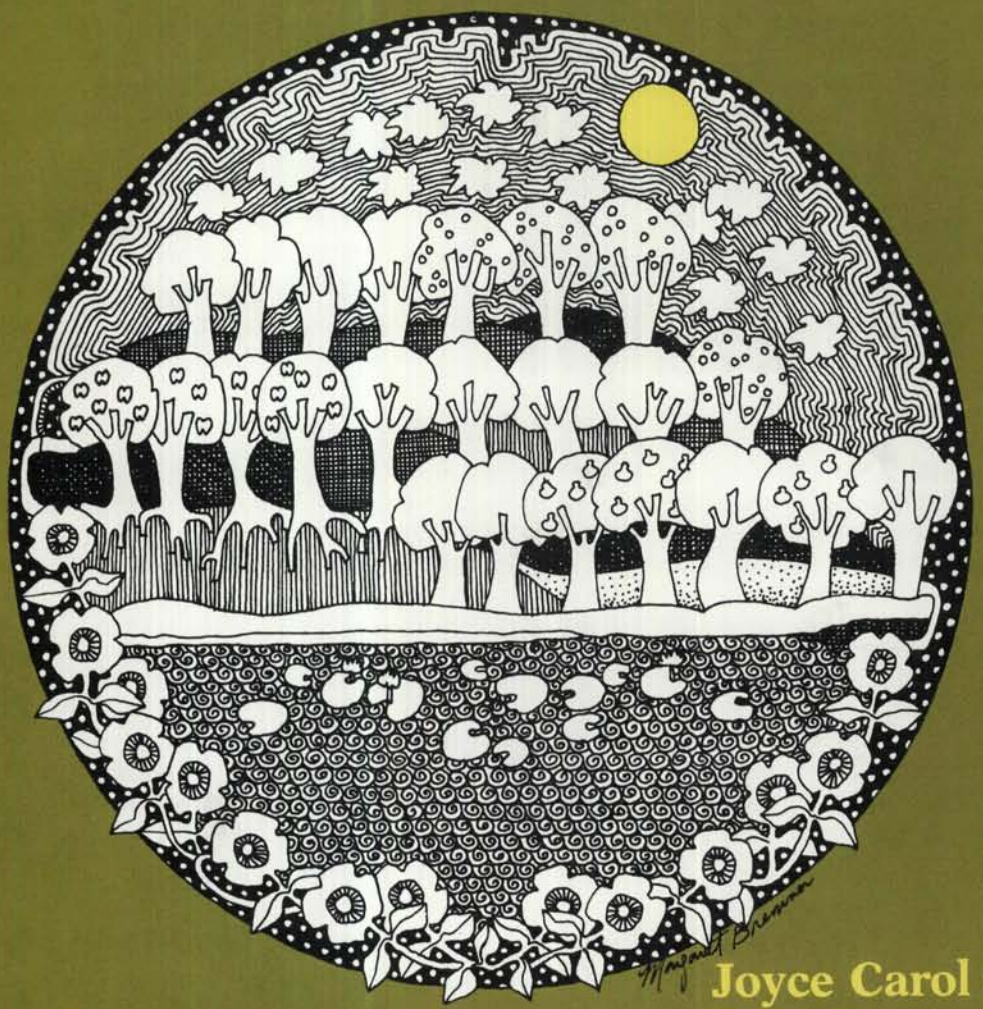
NIAGARA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

PRING
CTION ISSUE

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

$2.00

March 1981

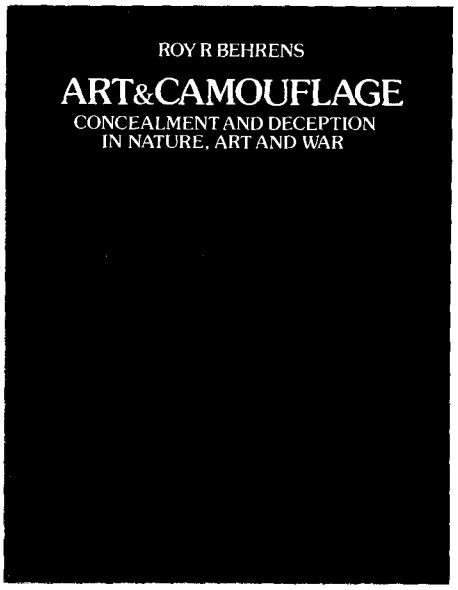


Joyce Carol Oates
Paul E. Garcia
Carol Adorjan
Raymond Carver
T. Coraghessan Boyle
Cathy Earnest
Scott Sanders
Vera Inber
Richard Kostelanetz

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PICASSO: We invented camouflage—it's Cubism!

BRAQUE: I was happy when the army used the principles of my Cubist paintings for camouflage.



Countless authors and artists have alluded to the curious resemblance between Cubism and camouflage, but no one has ever pursued it. **ART AND CAMOUFLAGE**, both a history and a theory, traces the direct involvement with military and natural camouflage of major artists, including Arshile Gorky, Moholy-Nagy, Ellsworth Kelly, Oskar Schlemmer and numerous others.

Large format, illustrated paperback, 96 pp., $10.95, extensive bibliography.

ART AND CAMOUFLAGE is a succinct and lucid account of the coinciding developments of military and natural camouflage studies, Gestalt psychology, Dada, Surrealism, and the Bauhaus. It is a theory of art, design, and creativity, considered in relation to such seemingly disparate subjects as metaphor, humor, and scientific discovery. It is a book of value to artists and students of art, art historians, military historians, psychologists and psychiatrists, zoologists, anthropologists, scientists and others.

"Roy Behrens is a rare example of the graphic artist who is also wonderfully skilled as a writer. His sentences are hale and athletic, alive with sense and excitement, and go about their business with an admirable briskness."

Guy Davenport [from the preface].

Order directly from **The North American Review,** University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614, or from your nearest bookstore.

ISBN 0-915996-07-3

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

REVIEW

Founded in 1815 Volume 266, Number 1 March 1981

EDITOR
Robley Wilson, Jr.

POETRY
Peter Cooley

ENVIRONMENT
Joseph W. Meeker

DESIGN
Roy Behrens
James Buckels

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Margaret Atwood
Richard Brook
Leo J. Hertzel
Kenneth Lash
John Lindberg
Barry Lopez
Stephen Minot
Mary Peterson
Lawrence Sturhahn

BUSINESS MANAGER
Charlotte L. Wilson

EDITORIAL &
BUSINESS OFFICES:

University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614

RATES:

$2.00 a copy; $8.00 a year in the U.S. and its possessions, $8.50 in Canada and Latin America; all others $9.50 a year.

Cover drawing by Margaret Bremner. Illustrations by Roy R. Behrens (10, 20, 28), Susan Miles (25), K. Dyble Thompson (30), Alicia Czechowski (39), James Buckels (42), Christel-Anthony Tucholke (48), Diana Hedges, Kate Henderson, Catharine O'Neill, Cor Hoekstra. Photos by Lawrence Sturhahn (65, 67, 68)

FICTION

10 The Man Whom Women Adored, *by Joyce Carol Oates*
20 Chicken Business, *by Paul E. Garcia*
25 The Room with the View, *by Carol Adorjan*
28 One More Thing, *by Raymond Carver*
30 Hegira, *by T. Coraghessan Boyle*
39 My Protagonist in Vienna, *by Cathy Earnest*
42 The Recovery of Vision, *by Scott Sanders*
48 Nightingale and Rose, *by Vera Inber; translated by Marian Schwartz*
52 Four Circular Stories, *by Richard Kostelanetz*

POETRY

7 Morning on the Desert, *by John Judson*
7 The Apple Tree, *by William Virgil Davis*
19 Jabón and the Pill Hawker, *by Gary Gildner*
51 Earthquake Country, *by Brian Swann*

DEPARTMENTS

4 Familiar Matters: BEAR RIVER—FIELDNOTES AND FOOTNOTES, *by Don Stap*
8 Cuttings: THE DOMINATIVE CASE, *by Kenneth Lash*
54 Books & Authors: *reviews by Jerome Klinkowitz, Conger Beasley, Jr., Roger Mitchell, Robert Ian Scott, Robert Gish, and Loree Rackstraw*
64 Cartoons by CORK: WAR GAMES AGAIN
65 Film: VIGNETTES, VARIATIONS, AND THE NEW (REAGAN) YEAR, *by Lawrence Sturhahn*

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW [ISSN 0029-2397], March 1981, Vol. 266, No. 1. Published quarterly, in March, June, September, December by the University of Northern Iowa, 1222 West 27th Street, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. Annual subscription rates: $8.00 in the United States and its possessions, $8.50 in Canada and Latin America, $9.50 in all other countries. Second class postage paid at Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. Copyright © 1981 by the University of Northern Iowa. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the permission of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW. Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of the University of Northern Iowa. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage affixed. Fiction manuscripts will be read *only* between October 1 and March 31 each year. Claims for subscriber copies not received must be made within six months of date of publication. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to *The North American Review*, University of Northern Iowa, 1222 West 27th Street, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW is indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, the Humanities Index, Index to Little Magazines, Index of American Periodical Verse, the Book Review Index, and others. Member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM) and the Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers (COSMEP). Article reprints and back file volumes in microform are available from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 or 18 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4EJ. United States and Canadian newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bear River:

Fieldnotes and Footnotes

A few years ago in a city park on a summer night I stood beneath a broad, big-leafed sycamore watching half a dozen small owls flutter about like moths. They were almost near enough to touch and were apparently unconcerned with me. I was enraptured by them, by the mystery of what they were doing there, and where they had come from. I climbed the tree and sat a few feet out on a limb while they continued to move in a noiseless flurry from branch to branch. One pair sat quietly, eyes closed, just above my left shoulder. It was a balmy July night. The sounds and lights from the tennis courts, only a short distance away, spilled across the lawn to within a few feet of the tree. Ten feet off the ground, in a shroud of leaves, surrounded by tiny, puffed-up owls, I would not have been seen by anyone passing directly underneath me and could easily have been convinced at the moment that I was no longer in that world. A dream-like half hour passed. The owls did not leave, but I did. I walked away thinking I'd come back later that night when the tennis players were gone and the lights turned off. But the moments I remember come to me when they choose, and leave, and stay away as long as they like.

I have never learned what kind of owl I saw that night. Process of elimination—small, earless owl that might be in the Rocky Mountain West in July—suggests the flammulated owl, but I couldn't be sure. In this case, digging through books after the fact was risky: the flammulated owl is considered "uncommon" to "rare," and I did not make the crucial observation of whether the eyes were dark or yellow. And finally, I didn't care. I am sometimes driven to want to know the names of things, to classify and explain them, an obedience to my years of schooling. Then I swing the other way and seem to want to refute all my "learning." Lord knows I've had more than I ever set out to get. B.A., M.A., Ph.D., they came to me the way towns not on the map appear suddenly before you on a Sunday drive. I was headed west and the degrees were on the way. This is not to say they came easily.

I did go west, literally, from Michigan to Utah. In 1972 I had finished a somewhat overdue B.A. in English, worked a year as a printer, then applied for graduate school. I was a poet and wanted to be part of a creative writing program where I would get a degree for writing poems and be among a community of poets and artists. Little did I know. I ended up spending six years at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City on a teaching fellowship, mostly miserable with my new identity as teacher and fledgling scholar. And the English department faculty, filled with its own barely hidden insecurities and hostilities, showed very little trust and good faith in the graduate teaching fellows (about the middle of my stay there the lock on the department office was changed so "our" keys would not fit it any longer—it's amazing to think a faculty was not sure whether its doctoral candidates were becoming scholars and teachers, or thieves). Worst of all for me was that there was no silence that was not filled with foreboding or tension. And it was a bad idea to express doubts. Ignorance was something for undergraduates. Silence was an expression of ignorance.

And so I went to Bear River, a place where open water is surrounded by marshland and mud flats that reach in every direction farther than I've ever cared to walk. The water level is controlled by a dam and a series of canals and is no more than three feet deep at any point. Thousands of acres of shallow water shimmer like a mirage, and the whole vision is made more staggering by the land around it, which north, south, east, and west is flat as a dime. It stretches away where the water leaves off, a continuous plane as perfect as those in the geometry books. The sense of distance is increased by two mountain ranges, the Wasatch rising to 10,000 feet twenty miles to the east, and the Promontory mountains ten miles west at 7,500 feet Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, 64,895 acres under the control of the U.S. Department of the Interior, is in fact an even larger expanse than that, and the birds of course do not recognize any boundaries. There are no fences and the area has always seemed boundless to me as well. With clouds rolling over the valley, from the brink of one mountain range to the other, one can stand in the salt grass and feel the earth rotating. Some days it is dizzying. Herds of clouds pass by, grey, strung-out, sailing in a high blue ether, the air so pure it rings. The tips of the mountains tilt as the clouds slip over them.

* * *

The first day I spent at the Refuge in the late spring of 1973 was as much an accident as my night in the park with the owls. It was my first year in Utah, and my wife and I, without friends or family to visit, cast off our loneliness as best we could and took long Sunday drives. We drove into the mountains or through the small communities at the outskirts of Salt Lake City. One Sunday we looked at the map and noticed a bird sanctuary on the eastern shore of the Great Salt Lake. We drove north in mild sunny weather, but where the map showed a road leading to a sanctuary we could find nothing. Disappointed, we drove on farther north. In Brigham City, to our surprise, an archway over the main street proclaimed it the gateway to the "world's greatest game bird refuge." At the end of the next block we turned west following smaller signs and in five miles, the last houses behind us, we came to a marsh bordering the road. Several odd-looking birds, dark-bodied, long-legged, with down-curved bills, strode about in the shallow water. Two more came careening in off the wind before I could find the right page in my field guide—they were white-faced ibises. There were ten or more that I could readily see, and when I put the binoculars to my eyes and panned a distant shine of water, I saw dozens

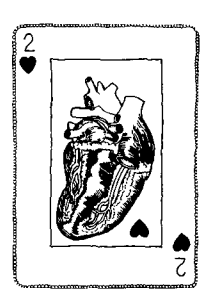
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more picking their way along the shore. Excited, we drove on, cattails and bulrushes becoming increasingly predominant at the road edge. The narrow paved road, flat and empty as far as we could see, led across mud flats dotted with salt grass, and then through grazing land for cattle where rough brown grasses concentrated. The mountains all the while loomed ahead of us, rising abruptly from the haze of the valley floor into the clear blue like those in a three-dimensional storybook. We hadn't gone half a mile when a snowy egret rose from the channel of water alongside the road and crossed in front of us. He would have seemed like an apparition if not for his yellow feet dangling behind him. He settled on the other side of the road and watched us pass. Before we could think of stopping we saw three more egrets coasting down to the water fifty feet ahead. We drove on, three or four miles an hour for the remaining ten miles. More egrets flew up, then great blue herons lifted themselves ponderously off the ground, tucking in their necks as they shied away with the wind. Avocets roamed the shallowest puddles with black-necked stilts. Killdeers cried as they trotted over the pebbles and mud. Ducks were scattering everywhere at our approach, and a marsh hawk skimmed the tops of the cattails. Bear River, which we crossed three times, wound in and out of view. As we rattled over the cowcatchers on the bridges, swallows flurried about, busy with their chores around their upsidedown mud adobes on the bottom of the bridge. Eventually we arrived at the end of the road where there was a compound of buildings, the headquarters of the Refuge. High above it, a single bird soared in widening circles on the warm air currents. He was white with black-tipped wings, and larger than an eagle. I was baffled until I entered the headquarters and learned that pelicans frequent the fresh waters of the Refuge, flying thirty-four miles roundtrip each day from their rookery on Gunnison Island in the Great Salt Lake. Each year a few simply die of exhaustion. Two years later I was to find one lying at the edge of the water.

* * *

Bear River originates in the Wasatch mountains over two hundred miles to the south, flows north, comes out of the mountains not far from Brigham City, runs roughly parallel to the road leading into the Refuge, and at the headquarters empties into a marsh delta with several thousand acres of open water, all of it draining into the Great Salt Lake. The Refuge was established in 1928, partly as a research station to study and control botulism in ducks, which in the early 1900s left half a million birds dead on the shores of the Bear River delta. It is one of the few remaining areas in the United States where fall concentrations of birds occur "in flocks that resemble the descriptions by early explorers." At any given time in early September there might be upwards of a million birds in the area. The ducks are most numerous. Pintails alone may number 500,000, green-winged teal nearly as many, and canvasbacks, 100,000. When the whistling swans come through in November or December on their southward flight it's not uncommon to have 15,000 stop over. I once saw 500 or more spread out over a mud flat a few hundred feet away. The air was chilly but a pre-winter sun slanted in, warming them as they preened and gestured. In the still air, their nasal trumpeting carried well.

At the headquarters there is a small circular drive and a gravel parking lot, a bridge leading across the river to the buildings, and then a gravel road to the south that is the beginning of a twelve mile drive around one-fourth of the Refuge. The gravel is built up two or three feet. One is in fact driving on a dike, sometimes separated from patches of water and canals by a stand of reeds and bulrushes, other times conspicuously alone and alien in the car's metallic shell, like a target in a shooting gallery, with acres of water on both sides. There are fewer than a dozen isolated clusters of small trees, mostly willows. The only large tree is on the riverbank five miles east of the headquarters. The herons ignore this and nest on the ground where, it seems, with their gangly legs, they should be anyway. The resident pair of ravens nests in the metal supports of one of three observation towers. Their nest, added onto each year, was nearly four feet across when the Refuge employees took it apart three years ago to paint the towers. The swallows have another tower of their own in addition to the bridges. In the summer the marsh hawks claim the trees.



By late fall they are replaced by rough-legged hawks, and then Swainson's hawks, an occasional sharp-shinned, and quite often a golden eagle. The first bald eagle I saw, during the second winter I visited the Refuge, was perched appropriately in the only "real" tree, the one on the road leading in overlooking Bear River—a place to fish from, I thought. In winter the place is so overrun with hawks and eagles every telephone pole along that road holds the silhouette of a big-shouldered bird atop it.

* * *

When I was nine my mother bought me a bird book full of crude color drawings, migration maps, and a few words of decription. The same book is still being sold today, each page exactly as it was twenty years ago. I learned then in the fields around our house and in the woods down the road the names of the common birds, and I took pleasure in knowing something about them. I recall a satisfaction in knowing that certain birds went into the blue area on the map for winter and came back up into the red area for summer. There was something wonderful about those migration maps, something large and far beyond me, but held tangibly by the wavy bands of colors. My mother had her own names for the birds and her own life histories for them. The bluejay was known and despised for being a bully and killer. Juncos were simply "snow birds," preferred to the sparrows with whom they competed for bread crumbs in the winter. Old crow was a character, and in North Dakota where my mother grew up, a farmer might take one as a pet and split his tongue so that half human voice could find words.

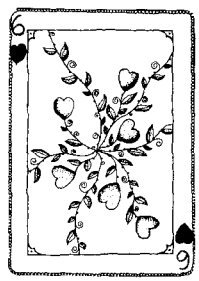
The red-winged blackbird was my favorite. They were everywhere in the fields, the male with his scarlet shoulder patch, hanging precariously on a stalk swaying under his weight, his peculiar two-part trill seeming to be neither song nor warning, only something he twirled and let go in the breeze on a warm spring day.

* * *

I drove to the Refuge many times, often alone, usually during the week when there were no other visitors. I began to know the place well, and I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spent hours sprawled in the stiff salt grass, watching strings of ducks and geese pass overhead. Sometimes I burrowed into a stand of cattails and made a natural blind. One day in October, group after group of pintails flew very low over my head, unaware I was there until the last second when they would swerve quickly toward the open water. They passed above me at nearly regular intervals of three or four minutes for an hour. I would hear them coming, their wingbeats a swift pulse, the sound arriving above me as if it had entered a funnel. I would see them for only a second before they swerved. My form remained pressed into the spot where I lay for some time after I had gone. I walked away looking back over my shoulder as if it had something to tell me.



One day, in March of 1977, a few weeks before I was to take my doctoral exams, I got up early, put on old familiar clothes, burrs still sticking to them from the weeks before, found my binoculars, field guide, laced my boots in the dark, and slipped out of the house. The drive to the Refuge was longer than I would have liked it to be, over an hour on the freeway, and tiresome. But on those mornings I went alone it served as a slow, half dreamy transition into the world, a second awakening. I stretched lazily as the sun rose higher and the wind buffeted the car and small thunderclouds rolled in from the west over the Promontory mountains. The weather in Utah always came clearly from the west, dipping into the wide arid valleys, and it was usually easy to guess the weather for the day. Farther north where I was headed, the clouds were thicker, bumping shoulders, and I suspected it would rain off and on all day, with bright warm sunshine in between, not an unusual pattern for Bear River. A few miles before Brigham City where the interstate ends and joins the old highway, the off-ramp rises steeply and curves above an isolated patch of water and marsh. There, I always felt, was the beginning of the birds' territory, the boundary where I left other things behind. Four or five coots would be puttering about, and usually there was an egret standing motionless in his own pure snowy light, a single illumined creature beneath the gray skies.

Five more minutes to Brigham City, and then due west to the Refuge. It was raining lightly by now. In the first marsh yellow-headed blackbirds gather in the spring, about mid-April. I always stopped there for this odd bird, a strange cross between a crow and a canary. And in April they were vocal! They sounded like small antique car engines trying to start up, hoarse and raspy, not at all like a bird, more like an overgrown insect. Every spring, coming out of the winter doldrums, I stood by the side of the road laughing at them, and at myself, for the foolish, impossible hope I shared with them.

I drove this day straight to the headquarters, slowed down through the gate, and turned left onto the first leg of the gravel road. A mile down I turned off to the right into two tire tracks that led into the heart of the marsh. I stopped about a hundred feet in where the bulrushes and cattails grew the tallest and hid the car from view. There, the spring before in a light rain just like this day, a friend and I watched from the car as a fat, sleek skunk ambled out of the bushes, nosed around a bit at some feathers in the tire tracks, then waddled back to where he'd come from. Now, for the moment the rain had become a mist, the sky a touch brighter. I stepped out of the car, my boots sinking into the wet ground, and walked west along the tire tracks toward a canal I always visited. Often I would lie at the edge of the slow-moving water, hidden by the reeds, and listen and watch, and half doze off as mallards and grebes drifted by. Only the grebes would guess someone was watching. They were the most suspicious of birds, always glancing side to side for danger or for minor annoyances like me. They would fidget nervously about for a few seconds as they came closer, then dive and be gone, reappearing thirty feet upstream. Occasionally one would dare to swim by, only putting on a little extra speed, his snake-neck straining forward.

This day I sat for half an hour, not taking any care to hide myself, pair after pair of startled ducks squawking and flapping as they crashed through the reeds out of the canal when they came upon me. I felt soothed by the mist on my cheeks, by the soft fish-light, and the stillness. I was the only fool out in this gray weather, alone on sixty-four thousand acres—a good day for ducks my mother would have said; I laughed at remembering that phrase. I rubbed my ankles, sore from sitting cross-legged, got up, and walked a few yards along the water's edge to a small pool coming off from it, a perfect spot for a heron, but I had never seen one there. There too the reeds shot up to six feet on two sides of a narrow bridge of land leading across an inlet. I kneeled down for a second. I stared into the pool of water for some time, then looked up and ahead of me. There I saw a pair of wings—"hawk" I thought immediately—flapping heavily at eye level about fifty feet away. In the same instant I could tell they were coming toward me. Half-consciously I shifted my weight downward to remain still. In another second I could tell it was not a hawk but an owl with a three or four foot wingspan. For a moment I was stunned at my good fortune, and then the feeling passed and I thought or felt nothing. A few seconds more and he was ten feet away, still at eye level. And then he saw me. His big round face registered a slight tremor, but oddly he kept coming. *Five feet* away, staring straight into me, where I imagine he could see my heart at a standstill, he rose effortlessly, still moving ahead. All in one motion, without veering off his course he had arrived at a point three feet above my head where he hovered silently, looking down at me. He was so close that he took up most of the sky. He had tawny underwings and tiny black ear tufts. His eyes, golden yellow spheres growing larger like candle flames fanned by a breeze, were both disarming and riveting. An uncanny stare. Several seconds passed, and out of an animal reflex I raised my arm to shield my face. He swung around then and left, flying off as slowly as he had come. When he was out of sight I dropped back into my body.

* * *

A year later I left Utah, Ph.D. in hand. When I remember the six years I spent there, it's the moments that came to me by some happy accident that I remember most. What I asked for—a certain body of knowledge and a degree to validate it—I got, but I was lucky and got more than that, and another kind of knowledge as well—the great stretches of cattails and water, the wind coming down out of the mountains, the serenity of the immeasurable blue sky, and the silence of owls.

—Don Stap

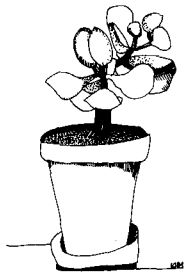
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN JUDSON

MORNING ON THE DESERT

Serdo, the terrorist,
loved silence, ghosts, and cheese.
He said to his mother,
"Desert mornings are really the best,
they hold the muteness of white whales,
the gown of the Sophist
at whose feet I sit,
smelling feet.
There, under such influence only,
can thoughts have bearing,
can a stomach grow to throw stones
at its own hunger.
Mother, I've become as
definite as Thor's finger.
I've remade myself.
Oh, after all,
wouldn't you live in moonlight,
if there were a goat
from whom you could always
get night cheese?"

His mother sat
regarding the palms behind him,
for somewhere a dream of Chopin
held the length of her dark hair
and played the bow of a young heart across it.
And she did not see Serdo,
she only strained to hear
the palms' applause.



WILLIAM VIRGIL DAVIS

THE APPLE TREE

for my brothers

There is not time to remember what is missing.
We have grown as old as the apple tree which leans
into evening. Save for one limb lost to lightning,

it is much as we left it. Each spring it is thick
with bloom and then the twisted apples of Ohio
weigh it down all summer. By fall the armies of boys

are bored with it, the way we were. In winter
there is nothing but the black bent trunk
and the tangled limbs against the stark white sky.

Each day it is saved by the dark, the way
this day, this February day, keeps me turning
the pages of the calendar back toward beginnings.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Dominative Case

Not long ago a friend and I were sitting in front of a fireplace, sipping coffee, staring at the quiet fire. Our conversation faded here, broke out again there. I wasn't surprised when he started talking about childhood. That's part of what fireplaces are about. But his opening remark offended me.

"My finest love affair took place when I was nine years old," he said.

"Ha," I said. "Too bad for you." And so forth.

He went on staring at the fire. "Her name—this is fifty years ago—was Virginia Palmer. We skated together, cross-handed. I ran the mile to Stanley Park, to meet her there at the edge of the ice. My heart was pounding just as hard before I started running as when I got there. . . ."

"Sound little puppy, weren't you," I said.

". . . She had yellow hair and straight features, like the ladies in *King Arthur* and *Ivanhoe*. I never kissed her because there were too many people skating, and on land, it wasn't the same. . . ."

"On land?"

"Once we were sitting together in the front seat of her family's car, parked in the garage. Her damned young sister was in the back seat. 'Why don't you kiss her?' she said, in that voice young sisters take, that nyah-nyah voice. . . ."

I stopped listening to his tale. It irritated me. Which in turn irritated him, and he left.

I served myself some more coffee, went back to stare at the fire. I was angry. Who wanted to deal with love as a dream? Worse, as an Ice Age emotion?

In the fire I began to see this fat shape, hairy as a mastadon or dona. She was in a kind of sheep-fold, with the other domestic animals. Old Low-Brow came grunting out from behind a rock, gave her some food and screwed her. The idea was kids, not love. A passion for fertility. In those days, fertility made you or broke you. Nowadays it's love that does it. Love and love alone. Oh, I'm bro-ken heart-ed. . . . People in their caves, moaning and groaning over the wins and losses of romance. Fertility gods replaced by Prince Charming, Cleopatra. Sex in society: civilized man's resentment against woman's power to attract and then say no; woman's bitterness against man's never asking her for anything else with the same wholeness of spirit.

Romantic love comes to us from the promising dream that we are not destined to live alone and isolated in the self. (The rescue means more than the rescuer.) But it's a promise that can't be kept. As a result, romantic love seems to float upon the surface, giving an enchantment of color, shape, and sense to life but unable really to mix with it. "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart/ 'Tis woman's whole existence." When I was eighteen I quoted that to a girl on a golf course, at night. I was trying to break up with her. I don't think she minded that so much, nor even the slur. What infuriated her was that I was quoting it from the volume of Byron she'd given me as a gift. Passion flared. For a moment we were in the hard space of reality. Passion has nothing to do with promises. It is no more a property of love than of hate, being rather a concentration of will. Rare, elemental, hot. The stuff of heroes. Holy war. Motherhood. Not Virginia Palmer.

I used to think my dog loved me. I was wrong, he worships me. And is therefore passionate in his devotions. My cat is passionate about hunting. What is a snake passionate about? Well, not getting stepped on, for one thing. At this level of passion, the aim is survival. But the fight for survival goes on at many different levels of intensity, and in many guises. For example, older needs for control over the world of spirits may now show up as a kind of deformed passion for dominance over each other.

Alain Resnais has recently made a film about the human need to dominate—*Mon Oncle d'Amérique*. Based on case histories, it examines the thesis that when the urge to dominate others is frustrated or defeated, the results are first anguish, then physical illness. We succumb to germs or malfunctions we would otherwise fight off. In short, the defeat works its way all through us. There are unsettling shots of industrial kill, of the career pack turning on the wounded (the fallen from favor) and finishing him off. As an examination of appropriate behavior, it indicates that Woody Hayes is right, Woody Allen wrong. A professorial voice instructs us that the human brain is still in a low state of evolution, its function primarily to act on specifics, not to think. To reason about action.

So far as I know, wisdom is not attainable through reasoning. Reason is hooked to result. It is immensely useful, often spectacular. And thoroughly helpless before the psychological needs of the simplest human being. Virginia Palmer. If he'd kissed her, felt her up, how would she exist now in his mind, in his body? She certainly exists in his body. Does his wife know this? If she does, what can she think to do about it? Dye her hair, dress up like a nine-year-old some winter day and drag him out on the pond? Let him fondle her cross-handed? Have his way with her, and be done with dreams?

We do so want our way, all of us. It's a want that begins at birth and never ends. Resnais' film says that it's more than a want. It implies that at the center of all of us exists not simply an urge to dominate others (and by extension all that is "other," including I must suppose space itself, and hence time), but an absolute need to do so. A need designed right into us. Napoleon, Medea, John Brown. "The lunatic triumphs of the human will." Or Eva Peron. The common dominator. (Bad jokes are their own form of domination. So are good ones.)

I may have missed it, but I don't

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

think the film went on to wonder whether the need to dominate is not in fact a universal principle, a cosmic principle in which the human simply participates. Entropy, for example. Black holes. Anti-matter. Polarities in their designed combat. The in-built urge of created matter to grow bigger . . . within a fixed frame of available "space."

I may have missed it because I kept looking for someone like my grandfather, who surely was a combatant, but singularly disinclined to it. He wisely married my militant grandmother, and turned all combat over to her (possibly the only thing she was ever really grateful for). After that he sneaked around loving people and giving them things. His film would start with early America-the-beautiful, beginnings in a small, dark dry-goods store; a miraculous cut, and there he is in the open Cadillac, sitting in the backseat with my grandmother (wearing, of course, a duster), being driven by a chauffeur. Another flickering of film, THE DEPRESSION, and he loses. First his money, then everything. A series of strokes. He lives on in an apartment and doesn't know who he is, or who has come to visit.

In the Resnais film there's a young woman who loses her love in combat with another woman. She loses because she is in love; her rival is impassioned. The object of their struggle is a man who has never grown up. The young woman throws herself not under a train but into a career. She becomes successful, finds herself part of an in-group badly wounding someone on his way down. It activates her own wound. Her lover had owned a small island inherited from his grandfather, had spent there the childhood he would never outgrow. The island is, as we say, a part of him. She goes back to visit it. Walks around it, barefoot. And of course he suddenly appears, come to get some documents from the house. There's a lawsuit over ownership, over whom the island belongs to. Good question. Further, whom does *he* belong to? Very likely to neither of the women. Probably to his grandfather.

Belonging to in the sense of ownership is always getting confused with the sense of belonging. We are told that slaves may have a sense of belonging that goes beyond ownership to identification with the place and fate of their owners. Robbed of most human choice, they nonetheless retain the human need not of belonging to, but of belonging. The second half of survival. Belonging *with*. People, patterns, communities, nations, gods, on and on. The part of us that wants not to dominate but to melt in. The question is, can you belong and still kick ass? Of course. Half man, half horse. Many of us fight for survival and take satisfaction in the fight. So long as we're winning.

* * *

A friend of mine went on scholarship from a drab high school to Yale. He had an outspokenly ethnic name, which in those days was not an in thing. Yale had only a small sprinkling of them, a kind of exotic pepper. My friend found himself for the first time in his life wanting desperately to belong. "Talk about the importance of naming things," my friend said to me years later, "I was in absolute awe, completely intimidated, by anyone who had a number after his name." Nowadays, whenever he calls on someone named, say, Morgan Stanley Masters, II, he asks to speak with Number One. He maintains it is ridiculous to inflict on your son permission to be a copy of his father. "Where's the kid's God-given chance to be unique?" he says. You can hear him yelling underneath. Old humiliations never die. I remember at age nine getting into a fight with the weakest fighter in our neighborhood. It was going to be a pushover, all the kids gathered 'round. He held me to a draw, he was furious, I couldn't beat him. Which became by bad magic "couldn't beat even *him*." Fifty years later I remember his name. Wasn't my other friend nine too, the one with Virginia Palmer? It may be that there are no small humiliations. Combat insists on its meaning.

Strange twists happen with humiliation in space and in time. When you're young, everything is important. Age turns the binoculars around, diminishing. We grow indulgent of our histories. But not of our humiliations. They never change size. Worse, we don't forgive ourselves for them, even when they're not specifically our own. Look what happens when history suddenly thrusts a magnifying glass in front of us not as individuals but as a species. Auschwitz. Man as gargantuan murderer. Six million people killed. Six *million!* Think of that ever-growing mountain of suffering, climbing up into the Judæo-Christian skies . . . from whence the message once came that to suffer is to be ennobled. The Germans burned up that hope while they were at it. Their story shows a deadness at the center of suffering, a lack of organic significance. In its unheard-of enormity it couldn't move a Pope to action, let alone secular governments. What remains to mark us is not, I'm afraid, the death of the Jews, but the humiliation to ourselves. Less because we did little to stop the murder than because we see ourselves in the murderer. Jews were killed; Christians were humiliated.

The Germans weren't turned into beasts, you know. They were turned into things. They received force, and passed it on. Unmodulated. Nothing of themselves in it. Simone Weil defined force as that x which turns a person into a thing.

That kind of injury is non-forgettable. Lodged in memory it grows, becoming over time a force itself. And used, even if only in fantasy. Somehow the memory creates an appetite, it's organic. If we can't feed it enough from our own experience, we appropriate that of others. Television, friends—the hunger for misfortune. I won't forget Virginia Palmer, and she isn't my problem. Wasn't, I mean. But I know how it would be if she were, if I wanted time to stop, tales to come true. I know how delicious it is to settle back into longing. I could feel my friend's sighs stoking the fire. I wasn't going to let him play poet on my time.

"My dog," I said, "was bred to herd sheep. In Hungary. Well, he's forgotten all about sheep, let alone Hungary. He's got it made in America. What he can't forget, though, is that he's scared of wolves. So he barks at everybody, hoping they'll believe him."

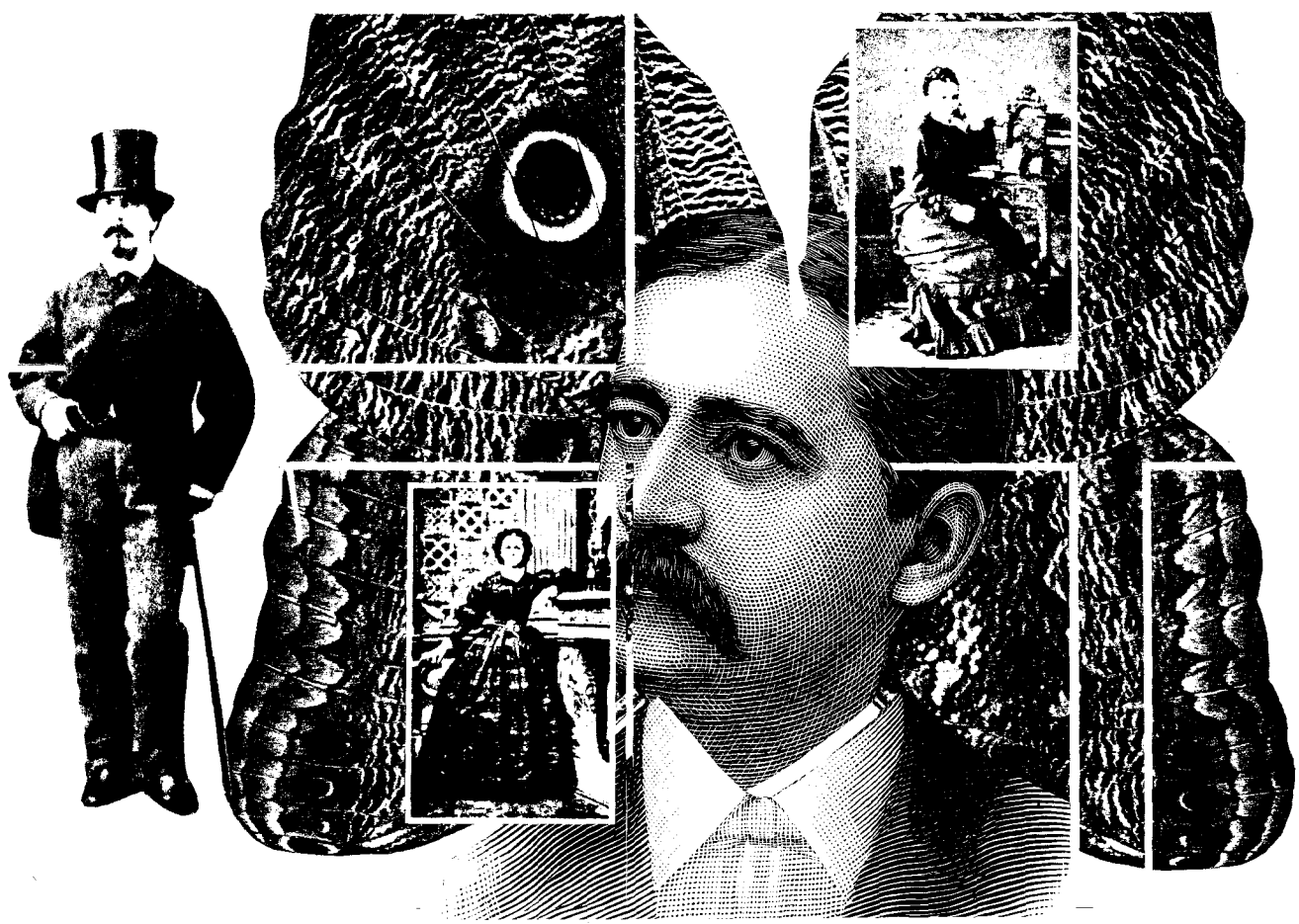
That's when my friend got up and left. Dreaming, I suppose, of moral blondness . . . in a biochemical world. "Don't be angry," I said, trying to deny him his turn. "Life passes," he said. Too lofty by half. "No," I said, "we do."

After he left, tired of the whole thing, I contemplated slitting the corners of my eyes and taking up Zen. But first, karate. As a matter of cosmic priority. But then I saw my grandfather in the fire, and then that goddam Marvin Hildebrand, and I stood up, cursing. . . .

—Kenneth Lash

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE MAN WHOM WOMEN ADORED



JOYCE CAROL OATES

The rumor was that he had died—had died of something sudden and catastrophic, like a coronary thrombosis or a stroke—or had it been a beating, in a disreputable part of the city?—but clearly the rumor was false: for there William appeared, unsteady on his feet, in the slanted acrid sunshine of early October, crossing Broadway at 14th Street. He might have been drunk. He was certainly unwell. With that elegant and slightly self-mocking gesture of his hand I remembered so distinctly he waved back traffic. The driver of a delivery van angrily sounded his horn, the driver of a low-slung rusted taxi edged forward, his fender brushing against William's thigh. I stared—I wanted to cry out a warning—for certainly he *could* be injured—but in the next moment William had maneuvered himself out of danger.

Was this derelict William? He had aged a great deal and his hair had at last gone white. But it was a coarse, sallow white, unclean. His face too was soiled, smudged: a mass of wrinkles, like a crushed glove: but the lips, and even the slightly swollen nose, still had that peculiar sculpted beauty. He wore a shapeless flopping overcoat that was clearly not an overcoat from his former life—he had probably bought it at one of the venders' stalls on 14th Street—and he walked with that dream-like precision of the drunken or the very old, his eyes fastened to the pavement at his feet, as if it were a narrow strip above an abyss, dangerous to navigate. His lips twitched, he must have been talking to himself: arguing, cajoling, explaining. I wanted to call out his name but I said nothing. I backed away. Turned away. I avoided him by ducking around a parked car and crossing the street through traffic.

JOYCE CAROL OATES' most recent book is Bellefleur *(Dutton).*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NIAGARA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

I thought he called my name, I seem to have heard my name, but I didn't look back.

Do you know, I said, once, not at all bitterly (for I watched myself: and I was rarely bitter), you are a man whom women adore?

William laughed, surprised and pleased. Of course he must have *known* he was a man women adored; but he had never heard the thought so succinctly expressed. He looked at me as if, for the first time, I had to be taken seriously.

That was long ago, of course. Many years. Both William and I have changed a great deal since then.

When I first heard the rumor of his death I had a vision of a gravesite around which numerous women in black stood in postures of mourning, not joined by their common loss but further isolated by it. And degraded too: for there is something degrading in such abject surrender.

I was not one of the mourners. I never mourn anyone I outlive—that is, anyone whose attraction for me I outlive.

In the beginning, William once told me, frankly and amiably enough, it was perfectly natural that everyone adored him. He was the youngest of six children; he had almost died of a throat infection as an infant. His family was genteel and all the soft luxurious emotions—love, tenderness, sentiment—were highly prized by them, the women especially. At the present time emotions are examined with a sort of amusement, held in the palm like exotic, possibly dangerous insects, but at the time of William's babyhood emotions welled up from sources believed to be sacred, when they were not demonic. William cried a great deal as a child and he was never made to feel ashamed of his tears. He was hugged, he was cherished. He was certainly the center of the universe.

His father was a partner in one of the oldest brokerage houses in New York City. His mother's family owned, among other things, iron ore deposits along the St. Lawrence River. William's parents lived with their six handsome children in an Edwardian mansion on Fifth Avenue; in their employ were nursemaids, serving girls, a cook, a chauffeur, an English butler, and other servants. It was the 1920's and everything lay ahead.

I begged William to show me photographs from his childhood. You don't seem real to me, I said. You don't seem weighed down by history, not even personal history.

(Because of his extraordinary charm, I think. His uncommonly handsome face, his graceful manners, his sense of self.)

We were intimate at that time. But not genuinely close. I had no right to make demands but he complied, after a while, and seemed as struck as I by the packets of old photographs he brought me one Sunday—"Baby William," "William at the age of 3½," "William on his first pony"—William with his pale curls, his smile that was ethereal and pouting by turns, his rather round, thick-lashed eyes, his charming little velvet suits and ruffled shirts. William, and never Billy.

There was something legendary about the child in those sepia-tinted photographs, as if he knew very well what was his due, what his beauty required; and knew too that he would never have to insist upon it. The immense calm of *being* loved, and having to do very little *loving*. (After William left me that Sunday I discovered a snapshot left behind which I must have slipped out of the pile, must have stolen, half-consciously. William at the age of 8. Unsmiling, even a little melancholy. But very striking. A child to be cherished. If William noticed that this photograph was missing when he returned home, he never mentioned it to me. He always forgave small sins committed through love of *him*.)

Between the ages of nine and fourteen William sang in an Episcopal boys' choir good enough to travel about the northeast. He discovered that he loved music—loved singing—loved the "religious atmosphere." Describing himself as a choirboy he meant to be amusing, but in fact his voice deepened with a kind of awe, as if he had been a witness to those stately processions and not a participant. How handsome the boys were—all the boys! William had worn a long velvet robe of a deep burnished wine color; his pale blond curls had been brushed off his forehead; the expression of his gray-blue eyes was grave and demure. Angelic, everyone said. Of course they fussed over him in the family, the women especially, but he saw how, as the boys filed out the center aisle of the church, into the sunshine, the congregation—men and women both—stared at him. It seemed as if he were walking in a dream through their odd rapt faces. They looked at all the boys but they certainly looked at *him*, week after week. Quite openly, not at all rudely, but as if it were altogether natural. Of course some smiled—some were friends of the family. But others simply stared. William met their gazes shyly and his cheeks burned and his breath went shallow. What did it mean, to be so admired! So *contemplated*. When the procession of choirboys marched out of the church, clean out of the church and into the ordinary daylight, when it appeared they were only boys after all, despite their long robes and carefully combed hair, William felt a keen disappointment. Was this it? Was this all? Had he imagined everything?

He loved the choir, he said. Even the rehearsals, even the choirmaster's peevish demands.

William was sent to his father's schools—Lawrenceville and Yale—and at the age of twenty-six he married the heiress to a meat-packing fortune out of Kansas City, whom he had met in Manhattan. Within a few years he was unfaithful to her. (Technically, that is. For of course he had been unfaithful to his young wife immediately after the wedding. There are smiles which, quickly and covertly exchanged, are consummate acts of adultery; there are even occasions when the refusal to smile, the fixing of a solemn stare, is dramatically adulterous.) Women so adored William, how could he keep himself from them? He sensed too an implicit approval from certain older men, like his own father. And surely there was enough of William for everyone—his spirit was magnanimous as a Sunday buffet.

But it really began, he told me in a voice that trembled with emotion (and so many years afterward!), when a cousin of his wife's, an ordinarily pretty girl of twenty-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eight, unmarried, from Missouri, came east to visit, to see their infant daughter. For some reason William and not his wife led the girl into the nursery. It was a hazy April afternoon, a breeze stirred the gauzy white curtains, the girl placed her cold, nervous fingers on the back of William's neck as he bent over the crib—and it was really the case, the girl maintained for years, that she had been unable to help herself. It happened, it simply happened, no one was to blame.

"Did you love her," I asked.

"Oh—*love*!" William said.

"But if she was the first—"

"She loved enough for both of us," he said flatly.

The first time I saw William, he was pointed out to me at a large gathering. It was a reception held in the newly-opened wing of a museum. There he is, an acquaintance said, there, do you see?—that man? (My acquaintance was the former lover of a woman who had been, as they said, "involved" with William for a brief period of time. His voice was coarse with an indeterminate emotion—jealousy, bitterness, a curious masculine pride.)

We became acquainted that evening. There was an exchange of telephone numbers. William was struck by the fact—or the postulate—that I was an "artist" of sorts myself. "It must be very difficult to write," he said, "I mean to write about serious things, to give the kind of depth to consciousness that it really has. . . . I mean, in my own head I am going in ten directions at once, even as I stand here, but in literature or art there's a wonderful single-mindedness that allows you to go deeply into . . . into the soul. Isn't that true?"

His enthusiasm was gratifying—it was intoxicating. We are always intoxicated with the danger of being overvalued.

So I became acquainted with William, who was already legendary in his own circle and who was moving out, in this phase of his life, into wider, more experimental circles. He had money, a great deal of money, for the acquisition of art by "unknown contemporaries"; he bought books, including high-priced limited editions; he would want, eventually, to help finance an off-Broadway play. Talking with him I felt the power of his own enchantment: I was buoyed up by his intensity, his marvelous gift for exaggeration. How could I resist summoning him to me, though I was hardly the kind of young woman who "summons" men—! He had my number and did not telephone. I had his number, and did.

His eyes were a wonderful keen gray-blue, widely spaced in his strong face, rather deeply-socketed. His nose was straight, and long, with a Roman bridge. Though he was only in his late thirties at the time of our initial acquaintance (we were to see each other intermittently for years—William was always "rediscovering" me) he did give the air of being older: there was something patriarchal about him, an authority graced with kindness, affection, an interest in detail. He was filled with questions about "craft" as well as "art"—he was dizzily flattering! Does a writer *feel* things more deeply than the average person, William wanted to know, and is it dangerous?—is it exhilarating?—or merely an aspect of one's professional skill?

"Suppose you were to write about me someday," he said shyly. "And I read it. And then—"

"Yes?"

"And then—well—well I would *know*."

He never spoke of his wife to me, and of course he never spoke of his other women. (It was fairly common knowledge that he had a mistress—and the word "mistress" is not inappropriate—who lived in one of the brownstones William's family owned, on West 11th Street.) Sometimes he alluded to his children: they were "expensive" children. His curiosity about my own life, my solitude, my eccentric working hours, my bouts of despair that could shift so abruptly into hours of fierce airy energy, struck me as unnervingly impersonal. He was interrogating me, he was learning from me, yet I was not very real to him. He might have thought my "art" protected me—I could not be injured like his other women.

He had a habit, not so annoying as it sounds, of humming tunes under his breath. Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, Rodgers and Hammerstein—that sort of thing. His smile could be melancholy, and then it could shift and dazzle you with—with the very fact, the impact, of good spirits—of sheer simple happiness. He liked to laugh, he liked to tell anecdotes. His stories were never original but they were wonderfully entertaining. At school and for a year in college he had wrestled and played football, and in the war he was said to have had a "distinguished" record; though he rarely spoke of that aspect of his past, as if sensing that it did not exactly represent him, I sensed in him the absolute calm that comes of a masculinity that has been put to the test and has not failed. Now he was freed of *that*, now he could give himself over simply to being adored. And the adoration, of course, had to come from women.

Sometimes he said, speculatively: "I might have been a priest, you know. An archbishop . . . ."

I understood his meaning. I said: "But you would have been an Episcopal priest, you wouldn't have had to take a vow of celibacy."

"I *would* have taken a vow of celibacy," William laughed.

Evidently he had wanted to enter the seminary as a boy. His father was disappointed but would not have opposed him; his mother was quite enthusiastic. But when the choir sang the Apostles' Creed in their high, thin, hauntingly beautiful voices, William's eyes flooded with tears because as he sang so winningly of his beliefs he knew he did *not* believe—it was impossible.

Certainly there might be God—that was reasonable enough—a presence called "God" that inhabited the universe without passion—floating through it, bodiless as cigarette smoke in a closed room—that might be true: but this presence had never taken on the contours of a personality, in William's experience. The Bible was strident and terrifying but not very convincing. As the years passed "God" became more and more abstract, more general. William shocked the chaplain at Lawrenceville by asking whether "God" wasn't a fancy word for "whatever happens." In any case God snagged on nothing immediate in William's life.

By the age of sixteen his belief had faded; and of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

course he had given up the choir long before.

I was sick, and William came to see me. As I lay on a sofa reeking and parchment-colored with jaundice this extraordinary man in his three-piece tailor-made suit bounded about raising windows, straightening the clutter of my life, making an attempt with a sponge—which was filthy—to clean my sink and cupboard counters. He hummed songs from *Porgy and Bess,* he whistled "Old Buttermilk Sky" so energetically one knew he had never listened to the lyrics. Though he was in his mid-forties at the time and beginning to put on *some* weight he was airy and light on his feet as a Chagall lover.

Had he been my lover, years before? He seemed not to remember. Though of course he was gravely considerate now, even courtly. He *might* have been a former husband.

He told me about his boyhood, and about the choir. He confessed that his success as an adult, and his personal happiness (for of course William *was* happy—no matter that he had caused so much grief) did not mean as much to him as those hours in church. If only he could explain—! The boys' voices lifting—the organ filling the immense church with its remarkable sound—the priest in his vestments—the sanction of the Church itself—the dizzying air of drama, meaning, intensity—

"Do you understand?" he asked, apologetically. "I'm afraid you can't understand."

But of course I did.

His second wife was said to be a gifted but erratic horsewoman, small-boned, quick and nervous and very beautiful; she brought with her, to the marriage, two young children and a $1.5 million estate in Far Hills, New Jersey. She was thirty-one and "shaky" from the experience of her first marriage, or at any rate from the protracted experience of adultery with William, which she could not have foreseen, with confidence, would develop into marriage. The divorce was mildly scandalous but did not come before a judge.

William was thirty-six years old. He loved the country, he claimed to be discovering "domestic life." (There were more than a dozen servants and groundsmen employed at the Far Hills estate.) He journeyed to the city only once a week, staying from Monday through Thursday; then he returned to the country where he cultivated a small vegetable garden and learned, with some difficulty, to bake bread. He took riding lessons at his wife's insistence so that he would be able to accompany her, eventually, on her daily rides.

But the rumors began again. There were always rumors. William this, William that. Of course he could not be blamed: women approached him: even the most gracious, the most genteel women: it was claimed they could not help themselves.

Oddly, as William grew older, and must have become less "attractive" in the usual sense of the word, the love women bore him began to acquire an increasingly desperate tone. There were scenes, there were threats, one or two attempts at suicide. A shouting match in the cocktail lounge of the Far Hills Hunt Club; a drunken street scuffle in mid-town Manhattan with the husband of a well-known actress. There was even a rumor, especially injurious because the subject was so petty, that William had put pressure on the membership committee of the Hunt Club by way of an older member's wife to get an acquaintance and *his* attractive young wife admitted to the Club. When the nomination was blackballed William was furious.

Shortly after this incident William's wife had an accident while riding, and badly smashed her right kneecap. She spent a long time in the hospital. After her recovery the two of them left for a protracted vacation—it had always been William's fancy to "travel around the world"—to Japan, to India and Ceylon—where both husband and wife became interested in Buddhism. They bought Buddhist art, took hundreds of color photographs, attended Buddhist ceremonies. It was said that they took instructions in Buddhism with a renowned teacher.

But William's wife grew ill with an intestinal disorder, so they cut their vacation short and returned to the States. She sold her horses one by one; there was talk for a while of selling much of the estate; then something happened, and William moved away to an apartment in the city—a legal separation was arranged. (I saw a photograph of William's second wife once, in a newspaper. Perhaps she had aged, perhaps the photograph was poor, but she did not strike me as unusually beautiful.)

Buddhism was one of the subjects William loved to talk about. He had memorized passages from certain sacred texts, which he loved to recite in his rich dramatic voice. *When the mind is disturbed it will strive to become conscious of the existence of an external world and will thus betray the imperfection of its inner condition. But as all infinite merits in fact constitute the one mind which, perfect in itself, has no need of seeking after any external things* . . . . These were the words of Asvaghosha, a Sanskrit philosopher; William was not absolutely certain of the pronunciation of his name.

But then he loved to talk about so many things. It gave him joy simply to talk, to hear his own voice, to gauge its effect upon others. He gossiped, he recounted the plots of novels that had "struck" him, he worried aloud about the international economic scene, he criticized restaurants and nightclubs, he knew amazing little stories about government officials, exiled royalty, fashion models. Once he telephoned me simply to talk about the "extraordinary" writings of a Frenchwoman named Anna de Noailles of whom I had never heard. As he spoke I could imagine his handsome face lined with thought . . . *thought,* not worry, of the most noble sort.

He began to see me again, with more regularity. Much had gone wrong in my life and he saw it as his mission to "rouse me from despair." He loved to speak, in long rambling charming monologues, of "serious" issues—God, immortality, the soul, how to live. These were genuine issues; they were more important than anything else in life; yet no one knew the first thing about them.

William did not fall in love with me, even then, though my wretchedness, and my obvious need for him, must have been a temptation. (As he grew older these temptations were to become more difficult to resist.) But I think he was in love with—he was fascinated by—my

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

apparent intimacy with these "serious" matters. I was a writer, after all. Not only a writer but a woman willing to live a spartan, severe, even monastic life in the service of my "art"; it was no exaggeration to say that I never went for an hour in those years without thinking of certain solemn, marvelous, slightly outlandish "questions"—the riddle of death, the paradox of our yearning for immortality encased in our mortal flesh, and so on, and so forth. I was not only willing to sacrifice myself for my art but in fact was doing so, and quite visibly.

Other women who had adored William had certainly been serious enough in their adoration of him, but they hadn't really been serious *women*—they were not obsessed with such matters. It is possible that William, though he loved them, might have believed that they deserved their misery, for wasn't it absurd of them—wasn't it an aspect of their vanity—that they should *presume* his love for them would be permanent? Sometimes he recounted anonymous incidents of a dismayingly petty nature, and we burst into mutual laughter; for wounded feelings, grief, jealousy, even rage *were* amusing. Another time he told me of scenes he'd had with his second wife near the end of their marriage: the poor woman had stopped accusing him of infidelity and had begun to claim that men were pursuing *her*. William would listen to her tales, and force himself to say, And—? Yes—? What happened—? with an air of startled and irritated possessiveness that indicated he still loved her. She would conclude her stories by saying in a small neutral voice:—Then I told him I couldn't see him again, I told him I was in love with my husband.

William sighed and laughed and rubbed his face brusquely. The great haunting philosophical questions—how are they to be linked, to be yoked, to such painfully *physical* moments? His life was becoming a riddle. He could not solve it. It seemed to him repeatedly that the women he adored in his imagination were betrayed by their counterparts in the real world. Self-pitying tears, unconscious vulgar expressions, banal or ignorant remarks. . . the mistaken notion that passionate jealousy would flatter him. . . "You're a writer," William said to me, "you must have thought about these things deeply, so perhaps you can explain: why does everything fail?

His question angered me. That he should assume that *everything* failed—! *Everything*, when he meant of course only *women*; not even *women* so much as *adoration*. I said impatiently that it isn't the role of the writer, or of any artist for that matter, to *explain*.

"It isn't?" William asked with great seriousness. "Oh, I see. Then what is—?"

At that time I was just recovering from a long illness. Not a "medical" illness but an illness just the same. I was grateful to be alive, and resented William's tone. I said: "Well—first we survive. And suggest pathways."

William stared. He was silent for a long moment. It was clear that he admired me, and his admiration was always flattering; but it could not last. He stared, and nodded, and repeated: "I see. Yes. *First we survive.* Yes."

He was under the enchantment, or was it the curse?—of his own being. Which was one of the reasons I telephoned him a few months later, though I knew I should not be interfering with his life (he had married again, a third time, and was living on East 72nd Street, in an apartment overlooking the river).

He was in his early fifties now. He had gone through a period of intense revulsion for his work—for everything to do with finances, with money itself—but had come through. It was said that he was "happily" married at last.

I called him, though there had been a tacit agreement, on my part, that I would not bother him, and I heard his voice register surprise and disappointment and courtly patience and finally concern as I explained as frankly and calmly as possible that I only wanted to see him, to talk with him, one more time. . . I did not break down. There were no tears. He took a cab to my apartment; I hadn't needed to beg. And somehow it happened, I am not certain how or why, that by the time he arrived I had dropped off into a profound stuporous sleep, from which I had to be awakened with great effort on William's part. (Poor William! He guessed, correctly, that I had taken a dozen or more sleeping pills, washed down with vodka. That I had *wanted* and had *not wanted* to die in his arms.)

So it happened that William saved my life. He shook me awake, shouting, and hauled me to my feet, and forced me to vomit, and afterward made black coffee which he forced me to drink. He was stern, he was furious, there was nothing loving about him, and I was angry at him for saving me, and then, a few minutes later, hysterical with gratitude. Stop, stop, shut up, he said, I've had enough of you.

But he gave me a considerable sum of money—considerable from my point of view, I mean—enough for several months' rent—and I had reason to think he paid the superintendent of the building to watch me, to do a little amateur spying. He wouldn't have wanted one of his women to die on him.

He telephoned frequently, to see how I was. In a voice meant to be encouraging he assured me that my behavior was nothing more than eccentric. He had been reading about certain "temperamental" artists lately—Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. (He sent me an excellent reproduction of Schiele's *Girl in Black Stockings,* saying that the figure reminded him of me!—a statement I took to be preposterous.) "Such spells, such moods," William said, "are probably quite normal for your nature and your genius."

"Genius?" I inquired mildly.

"You have to do these things," William said slowly. "I think I understand."

"But your other women do them too," I said. "Don't they? Haven't they?"

"My other women—?" he said.

"Don't you have other women?" I asked.

"Of course not," he said. "I'm happily married now."

A few weeks later it occurred to me to test William's friendship by asking for more money. Just a little more. A loan. And he did not disappoint me though I think he was hurt. (His voice registered hurt. I had called him at his office on Bank Street.)

"I'll send you a money order," he said. "But that will have to be the end. Do you understand?"

REPRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Of course I understand," I said softly.

He was about to hang up, then changed his mind and asked my opinion of—what had it been?—a new sculpture exhibit, a new "difficult" novel? We talked for a few minutes. Again he was about to hang up. Then he happened to mention, as if incidentally, that he was having difficulties with his new wife after all. He loved her very much, he said. But for some reason he couldn't seem to make her happy.

"Do you know what she said last week," he asked in a puzzled voice.

"No. What did she say?" I asked.

"She said—If you leave me and go to any of them, any one of them, ever again, I won't be here when you get back."

I slapped my hand over the receiver to hide my laughter.

I said, "Then you mustn't ever leave her again."

He said, "I know."

"You *mustn't* ever leave her again."

"I know," he said, his voice rising. "I know."

As William grew older and his life became more unpleasantly complicated—there were problems with his grown children, there were problems with his family's business—it happened that the women who adored him were more and more distant from his social world, and more desperate. And, except for a thirty-seven-year-old actress ("Anne-Marie"), they were getting younger.

He was still a striking man, of course. His silver-blond hair receded gracefully on a brow that was imposing; his cheeks were ruddy, as if with exuberant good health. His lips were so sharply cut as to suggest sculpture. It was not an exaggeration to say that he was a beautiful man, for his age at least, maneuvering himself about like an athlete past his prime but still in superb condition.

His wife had been an artist of some sort—or perhaps a designer or an interior decorator. It was said that she had given up both her marriage and her job for William. She loved him passionately, with a young girl's caprice. (She was in fact forty-two years old.) She could not shake off the notion—which was hardly so far-fetched as observers thought—that William's love for her began to diminish as soon as they were married and he had "saved" her from her former husband. Their quarrels were tempestuous and exciting. William had to shout her down, and then comfort her. Help me, why don't you help *me,* he whispered, but of course she did not hear, or if she heard she did not understand.

In this marriage, William declared, he rediscovered "romance"—he and his wife met for drinks in little unknown bars, saw 6 p.m. showings of foreign films, held hands in the dark, strolled along the busy avenues, stopped for dinner impulsively in restaurants they had never seen before, and often could not find again. He was very happy. His wife was a woman with whom he might discuss Shakespeare (whose complete plays he meant to read, one by one) and even Schopenhauer (whose *World as Will and Idea* he was trying to read at last—he'd heard so much about it for decades), or the latest bankruptcy scandal on Wall Street, or the mysterious meditative nature of bread-baking. (William was trying to bake his own bread again, on the weekends. It was all he seemed to retain from his Buddhist period.) Everyone said that it was obvious his wife adored him.

It was a happy time. Yet friends were disappearing from his life.

Invitations went unanswered, calls were unreturned. An old classmate from Lawrenceville, a corporation lawyer whom William saw for lunch two or three times a month died suddenly of a heart attack, on an early train from Greenwich. One of his old Yale suite-mates lost a great deal of money in real estate speculation in Long Island and committed suicide—shot himself in the head. Other friends and acquaintances drifted away because, it turned out, they belonged to William's ex-wives rather than to William, or because, remarried themselves, they found it difficult to interest their wives in their old connections. And it seemed too that William was beginning to drink too much in company, and his "charm" and "high seriousness" were becoming tiresome.

He was obsessed with the same old topics. How to live—what is love—why are we on earth. The "meaning" of death. But his voice often slurred and he was developing the habit of nervously squeezing his listeners' arms for emphasis.

A mild heart attack at the age of fifty-six. So unexpected! And unjust, for William *had* been dieting, he *had* been exercising and watching his weight. (He had joined an impressive new health club on Lexington Avenue where he swam for a vigorous half-hour before taking a cab down to work.) In his doctor's office he spoke resentfully; his face grew coarse; he knew he had been unjustly treated. His wife was blackmailing him emotionally, he said. Women had always blackmailed him. He couldn't control it. . . Couldn't understand. . .

The heart attack had been dangerously mild. William insisted for days that it had been nothing more than indigestion—only his wife's tears had forced him to make an appointment with his doctor.

He had said to her, irritably, Well—you can't expect me to live forever just for *you*!

The women were younger, scruffier, less clearly defined. One was a "psychiatric nurse" in her early twenties who was unable or unwilling to say exactly where she had trained, or where she had been employed (when William was introduced to her, by way of a friend of a friend, she was living on unemployment insurance and sleeping most of the day). Another was a "therapy assistant" who worked three or four times a week at a "clinic" in the West 40s, near the river. She was often vacant-eyed, her smile had no focus, her sentences trailed off into silence. A pretty girl, William thought, but mysteriously soiled; smudged; as if a playful giant had picked her up and smeared her with his thumb. The "psychiatric nurse" called herself Inez, the "therapy assistant" called herself Bonnie, a girl by the name of Kim Starr who struck up a conversation with William one mild June day in Washington Square was a former "ballerina." The girls had nothing in common but their youth, their vague blurry soiled prettiness, and their interest in William.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meeting him for a very late lunch at the Oyster Bar—it was after three—one of the girls snatched up William's hand and kissed it. "You in that expensive suit—it's tailor-made, isn't it?—and your shoes!—and your fingernails manicured—and that scent—did you just shave?—oh I love you, love you—I mean it—I wouldn't lie—I'm *crazy* about you, William," the girl cried.

Inez, Bonnie, Kim. And later the young step-daughter of a business acquaintance, named Deborah. William made it a point to telephone the girls several times a week from his Bank Street office, careful that no one should eavesdrop. (The place was in disarray. The outer office was being used for storage, there was an old carpet, stiff with dirt, rolled and tied and set on end in the corridor outside William's door, that had been there for weeks.) In his address book with the worn black cover William had scribbled down two and sometimes even three telephone numbers for each of the girls, but it often happened that they were not available at those numbers. Strangers picked up the phones, shouting Yes? Hello? Who is—? Their accents were harshly foreign.

William had not forgotten me entirely. Every few months he called, took me out for a drink, squeezed my hands in his and assured me that I was lovely as always. And how was my work going? and my life?

He was happy, he said. Though after two or three drinks he would complain mildly about his wife. She had completely redecorated their apartment, had even knocked out a wall, you can imagine the inconvenience—and the expense!—yet her moods were more capricious than ever. She imagined he had a mistress. She was even jealous of his former wives, and of his grown children. (It maddened her that William should continue to loan money to his children or give it to them outright, when his own financial problems were becoming so serious.) "I will soon be sixty years old," William said with an elegant, helpless gesture, "and I assure you I know nothing—not the first thing about love and marriage and children and how to live one's life—"

It was my strategy that day to speak lightly. I said: "Too many women have loved you."

"What?" he asked, cupping his hand to his ear. "—Love? Oh, that!"

In a dark gold-flecked mirror I spied upon the two of us, seated at a pretentious little pedestal table of simulated marble. William had become an aging gentleman with hair that looked white; I was a woman with a shadowed face.

The lounge was disagreeably noisy. New customers were continually filing past our table.

"I suppose you're going to write a story about me someday," William said, raising his voice. He was both accusing and affectionate. "And if you do—I wonder: do I dare read it, or not?"

It was not long after this meeting that William happened upon Deborah, the eighteen-year-old daughter of a business acquaintance. Though in fact she was the man's step-daughter.

She was walking north on Seventh Avenue, near 8th Street, with her arm around the waist of a slender, swarthy-skinned young man in a white shirt. She was obviously drunk, or high on drugs. She nuzzled the young man's neck, giggling, and staggering against him; it seemed awkward, it seemed rude, that the young man didn't trouble to slide his arm around *her*. William stared in amazement. He had last seen this girl at her parents' summer cottage in East Hampton, years ago. Deborah must have been no more than thirteen or fourteen at the time, yet he remembered her face distinctly.— Deborah, William whispered. Here? Like this?

On the street that day she was wearing clumsy high-heeled shoes with open toes, and jeans that fit her slim body tightly; her red-brown hair tumbled past her shoulders, snarled and matted; her pale skin was freckled as William remembered. She was wearing theatrically red lipstick but the lipstick had smeared onto her face.

William followed the couple for a block or two, and saw that they were not getting along well. Deborah's mood had changed: now she was pushing and slapping at the young man, who slapped her right back. Passersby stared at them. William came hesitantly forward. He called her name and she ignored him. She was saying something in a low rapid furious voice to the young man.

"Deborah—?"

Finally she turned and saw him. It was astonishing, it was miraculous, the stages of her *seeing* him. At first her gaze merely swung onto him, as if he were an intruder, a stranger; and then her expression sharpened; and then softened; and it was clear from the change of light in her eyes that she recognized him.

"You're— You're— Oh Jesus I can't think of your name—"

She staggered forward, she clutched at his arm.

"Oh Jesus I can't think of your name but I *know* you—"

William tried to tell her but she was too excited, too high, to hear. Her voice was all exclamation, her eyes were glittering, he could smell the odor of dried perspiration on her body. It was certainly Deborah, his friend's step-daughter; they knew each other and their behavior on the street—for now Deborah was hugging him, she had thrown her arms around his neck wildly—was really not so extraordinary as it might appear. William's face flushed scarlet and he did not know what to do with his hands.

"Oh I *know* you—I *know* you—" the girl wept.

One terrible night the telephone rang in the apartment on East 72nd Street. And William knew from his wife's voice, and her expression as she called him to the phone, that this was Deborah at last.

It was many months later. The start of November. William had given Deborah his home number but begged her not to call unless it was an emergency.

She was not very coherent on the phone. There were voices—they might have been angry, they might have been merely festive—behind her.

"Yes? Deborah? What is it? What are you saying?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"—in trouble," she said, "I think I'm in—"

"Deborah? Where are you?"

"I'm in bad trouble," she said, "I'm in bad trouble—"

He asked her what was happening, how could he get to her, but she kept repeating that she was in trouble, in bad trouble, until she began giggling, and the phone must have been taken from her, and slammed down.

William's heart was pounding in his chest. He had to sit—had to grope for a chair. It was a long time before he heard his wife's questions. "One of your girls, wasn't it, another one of your girls, *wasn't it,* don't lie, don't you dare lie to me—!"

He did not answer her. He did not really hear her. He was waiting for the telephone to ring again but of course it did not ring and he sat beside it for several hours, numbed, in a trance of sheer despair, too upset even to heave himself to his feet and go to the liquor cabinet.

Near dawn he tried the door to the bedroom but his wife had locked it against him. So he slept, fully clothed, his shoes on, on a leather couch in the room he called his study.

The calls came infrequently that winter, though William was always prepared for them, and bitterly disappointed to hear the wrong voice. His wife laughed: "Oh, wasn't that the girl—? Oh what a pity!"

"There is no girl," William said. And then, befuddled, licking his lips: "She's the daughter of an old friend. The step-daughter."

"What old friend?" his wife asked. "You haven't any friends."

Sometimes he wandered about the apartment at night, lingering in the doorway of his study. It was alarming, the vividness with which he could recall the girl. He had escorted her along the street that day, he had taken her uptown in a cab, and once in the cab they had fallen upon each other hungrily—the girl had clutched at him, kissing him, and he had responded with a convulsive frenzy he had not known—he really had *not* known—he was capable of making. Though it was possible (as he thought afterward) that he had merely succumbed to the girl's passion.

He took her to a hotel on Seventh Avenue. Not one of the better hotels—because he hadn't much cash with him that day, and didn't care to use his credit card; and because, in a better hotel, the girl's noisy exuberance might have attracted attention.

Her arms were like steel bands around his neck and back. She screamed, she wept, she rolled her head from side to side, in a transport of passion—so clearly unfeigned!—that excited him more violently than he had been excited in many years.

And then, afterward, she had not wanted him to move from her.

"No, no," she said hoarsely, angrily, "no, I want you there, I want you *there,* I'll kill you if you leave—"

So he lay on top of her, vastly flattered, sweating, his heart hammering in his chest, his thoughts racing so crazily they were colored paper streamers, razor-thin strips of confetti.

"Don't you leave me don't you ever leave me or I'll kill you—I swear I'll kill you—" the girl shouted.

She clutched at him. Her young slender body was rancid with sweat.

"No—no—no— Don't leave me—"

But his heart, his heart!—hammering so violently. He could not get his breath. Her arms which had seemed so thin were in fact hard with muscle—hard with the violence of her frenzied need.

But of course he had to shift his body from hers. It was impossible for him to make love to her again so quickly; he could not penetrate her again; his penis had shrunken, had gone limp. . . . Fortunately she grunted and pushed him from her and fell asleep, suddenly. She fell into a thin twitching feverish sleep that excluded him.

He lay beside her for a long time, his pulses racing. She was so young—so extraordinarily young! *That* did amaze him. The bodies of young women, young girls, which they inhabit so unthinkingly—the smooth unlined flesh of the thighs, the belly—the small hard lovely breasts—

My love, William whispered, close to tears. My sweet little love.

She gave him her telephone number. But she must have made a mistake, jotting it down so hurriedly on a scrap of paper; for when he called a woman answered, speaking in a querulous Spanish-accented voice, she knew no one named Deborah, knew nothing about Deborah, what was the number he had dialed?

Fortunately William had given her *his* number. Both at the office (where he preferred her to call) and at home. And she did call—she did call—always very late at night—always in a strange mood: she was gay, she was exhilarated, she was panicked, she was very, very tired. William was so pleased, so flattered, that he refrained from asking her exactly what it was she wanted from him.

William's marriage came to an end one snowy night in February.

This was the night Deborah called for the last time, and summoned him to her.

Her voice was shrill and terrified and clear: "Could you come get me right away?" she said. "There are some people here—some men—some very strange men—"

"Deborah? What is it? Where are you?" William cried.

"Oh William I'm so afraid—oh can you help me—William—"

It was a measure of her terror, that her voice was now so clear. Despite the noise in the background he could hear her words distinctly.

"What is it," William said, "what is happening?—where are you—"

"Oh William could you come get me—come in a cab—Oh please, please—"

"Deborah, dear, tell me where you are— Can you tell me where you are—"

His hands shook so badly, he could barely write down the address. And then it wasn't a complete address—just the intersection of two streets in the warehouse district, near the river.

"Deborah," he whispered, "Deborah— I'll be there immediately—Deborah?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But the line was dead. She had replaced the phone, or someone had taken it from her.

So William dressed, William prepared to leave, though his wife—in her nightgown, looking stunned and haggard—was trying to dissuade him. There was even some foolishness—a humiliating scuffle of sorts—at the hall closet. His wife was nearly crying. "Where are you going! What on earth do you think you're doing! It's two in the morning, it's bitter cold, how can you *think* of going out in your condition—"

On the icy street he ran, vigorous, frightened, shouting for a cab, waving his arms. It *was* bitter cold though he did not register the fact for some time.

It took him ten or fifteen minutes to get a cab, over on Fifth Avenue. By then he was shivering convulsively and his face and exposed hands ached with the cold.

And then, on the street again, he found himself hurrying along one block of darkened warehouses after another. The streets were poorly lit here; it was very hard to see. He rubbed his hands together, he muttered to himself, what would be wisest to do, what should he have done, should he have telephoned the police. . . . He dare not call her name: she might be held captive: her tormentors would be alerted.

Ice had formed curiously humped and coiled shapes on the sidewalk, upon which thin dry patches of snow lay. It was dangerous to walk so fast—the soles of his shoes were slippery—he had forgotten his overshoes—he had forgotten his gloves. A very cold wind was blowing from the river. He stared, looked from side to side, bewildered, why were there so many blank featureless doors?—windowless buildings? Loading ramps, immense sliding garage doors, an air of utter solitude, silence. No one lived here, surely. He would never find her here.

He ran from one side of the street to the other, panting, whimpering. If only he saw a crack of light— If only there was a doorway that might lead up into a loft— Piles of debris had been heaped in the gutters, and ice had formed over them. An uninhabited place. Blank featureless pitiless buildings.

"Deborah," he cried. "Deborah—?"

He could hear himself panting. And his heart, could he hear his heart as well?—queer clipped arhythmic beating—now rapid, now slow—a hiccupping sensation—no pain but a sudden surprising airiness—

Far up the street William saw, suddenly, figures on a stoop. They were just leaving a building, were they? He stared at them for a long moment before he had the sense to shout at them.

"Wait," he cried, hurrying forward, "you there, *you*—wait—don't let the door swing shut—wait—don't let it lock—"

Three or four figures. Young people, probably. They ignored him, they strode away in the other direction.

"Wait," he cried, "oh please wait—"

He stumbled forward, whimpering with the cold. His breath was alarmingly loud. He had forgotten his gloves, he had forgotten his overshoes. He could not remember—exactly—the girl's name. She was the daughter of a friend. An old friend. She would know him, of course, when she saw him. If only they had not let the door swing shut— But then perhaps it had not *locked*—

It was locked, he seized the knob and tugged at it, crying "Open up! You in there! *You*! I know you're listening!" He pounded on the door. Fist over fist, whimpering with the pain, on that blank ungiving door.

"Open up, do you hear? I know you're in there! I know what you're doing to her! I insist—"

They must have been listening to him, in frightened silence. For he heard no sound. No sound at all.

The building was a warehouse. There were enormous sliding doors made of corrugated aluminum or tin; there was a loading ramp upon which ice had formed in serpent-like coils. He could see no windows though the building was four storeys high, at least. A blank featureless pitiless facade.

William's shouts echoed faintly in the streets, among the high buildings. It was remarkable, the silence in this part of the city.

"Open up!" he cried, his face now wet with tears. "I know you're in there, all of you— I've come for her— You can't deny me— She's in there and I know what you're doing, I know, but I won't let you—I've come to take her away—"

He pounded on the door until there was no more sensation in his fists.

One day William appeared on my doorstep. I had heard rumors of his death—he had been renting a room by the week in a hotel on West 47th Street, he had been found dead in the room, or collapsed in the street?—or had he died in the hospital? Obviously the rumors were false.

It was a fact, however, that he had been eased out of his partnership in the family business. But without putting up much of a defense.

A fact, too, that his marriage was over.

He had not wanted to talk about these misfortunes, however. He wanted only to talk about general things, "serious" things, the old issues of life and death and the immortality of the soul and how to live one's life. . . . He was inquisitive about me: had I accomplished what I wanted, was I happy, did I regret living alone? (For now, at my age, it was too late. Quite clearly too late.)

We talked. Beneath William's words I could hear him pleading with me, silently. Do you still adore me, he was asking.

I had not much time for him that day. It was late afternoon, I was on my way out. I pitied him because the enchantment was over—one could see that at a single glance, the poor man looked so battered, so hopeful—but I had not much patience for him. None of us do, once the enchantment ends.

Do you still adore me, do women still dream of me, William was pleading, his watery eyes fixed upon me, his fingers (which were surprisingly dirty) plucking at the hem of his suit coat. Though of course he said nothing of the sort: he was asking about my life, my work.

I explained that I had to leave.

He walked alongside me for a block or two, before he tired. And finally he did ask, as he had been meaning to ask all along, touching my arm: "Will you write about me, do you think?—someday—?" □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GARY GILDNER

JABÓN AND THE PILL HAWKER

The stranger came across the *jardín* all in green
holding a box on his belly and biting a stick
like a dog. Rising from his hubcap Jabón
watched him wipe his head and spread a dirty
blanket on the ground. —And then the sickness.
Jabón chewed his rag to see the purple meat and bubbly
brain. The swollen knuckles. And the worst, a baby most
like chicken guts, half born. Sheet after shiny sheet
the green man laid the sickness down and showed his teeth.

He shouted and the people came. They saw the sickness leap
under the green man's tapping stick, and pinched the tendons
in their necks; they saw the black
blooms of growth, like cauliflowers fingered
by a sooty hand, and rubbed their sun-furrowed jawbones—
they saw the green man's angry spittle blossom
down on soft, gauzy places where a baby's mouth
would suck *nada,* on a stomach boiling tubes, on a doctor!
Then he stopped. The people stared. He began to croon.

He crooned and in the sun the sickness shone—
on the blanket in the sun the sickness oozed—
and sweat blistered the green man's lip as he slipped
a packet of lavender tissues from his pocket.
In the crowd he found a mother's dust-
colored palm, and laid a tissue in it, crooning,
stepping back, tapping the sickness again, here, and here,
keeping it down like a mad dog, a dog with a crab's face, a crab's
black bite. Several palms now shaded Jabón's head. He groaned.

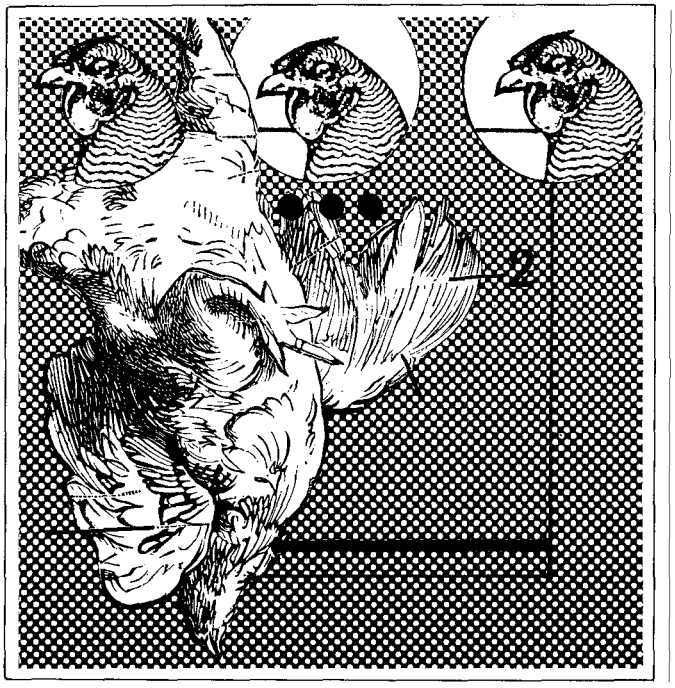
The green man danced and dancing puffed
his eyes all white. The sickness burned his stick,
his feet, and Jabón on his knees
moved back. He saw the green man's shiny shoes
flash fire, felt the ashes on his tongue . . .
if only he could pull it out and wrap it in his rag!
Aqua, Jabón bent his head low as it would go, *aqua* . . .
A yellow jar, cool, was laid against his cheek.
He pushed out past his lips and licked it.

The green man raised up Jabón by his chin and hissed
a new and higher anger at the sickness—down, down
against it went the stick—and Jabón wept, and weeping
saw a fat tomato worm crawling in his eyes, back
and forth, over his nose, eating everything and drinking all
his tears. Jabón slowly fell again, lost in darkness.
He moaned. He looked for the sun. He saw it, tiny as a bean,
between the green man's fingers! *Sol,* Jabón cried out, *el sol* . . .
El sol, the green man said, *el sol.* And fed him.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHICKEN BUSINESS

Paul Evaristo Garcia



The sundisc, pale red in the grey February sky, dips behind distant snow-covered hills as Mark enters the cafeteria of the poultry processing plant. This, the pickup crews' section, is a large and warm underground room, pipes and wiring exposed overhead, lockers, vending machines, rows of formica tables, wooden benches. He's early. Not many have arrived. A group of Frenchmen sit at table discussing the new snowmobiles, comparing them to models of past years. Relaxed, passing the time before work, they drink from thermoses of hot coffee. A few longhairs stride in, some wan, dissolute, others animatedly trading deer hunting stories, talking of the week-end just past. . .

Two men, Cokes in hand, one a stocky, crew cut Micmac, the other icey blue-eyed and red-haired with foaming mutton chops, stand by the machines, exchange joking insults with an old man at the table Mark has taken.

—Usin wood this yeah, Pap.

—Gaught it all cut?

—Prit neah three co'd.

—Heh. How you cuttin it? With a buttahknife?

—McCulloch. Brought in half co'd taday.

The old man, feigning disgust, spits tobacco and looks away, addresses the floor,

—Somethin wrong with a man that cahn't cut a co'd a day. . .

The two men sniggering.

The Indian, windy-voiced,

—Aw c'mon Pappy, you. . .

The old man aroused, belligerent,

—I'll cut a co'd befaw *dinnah*. . .

The two half laugh. The old man stands up,

—. . . with a gawdamn *BUCKSAW!*

The two men wear full grins.

Pappy sits, turns laughing eyes within a sullen face to Mark.

—Whatchu think? All pickahs crazy?

—Not sure, first day. . .

The red-haired fellow exclaims,

—Oh sweet beJEEzuz! Nevah picked befaw? What crew you on?

Before he can answer, the Indian addresses him,

—My name's Wilmot. This red-headed pecker is called Vinal. You'll be all right long as you don't listen to anything Pappy here says. . .

Pappy sipping the last of his coffee, chuckling, shakes out the cup, replaces it onto the thermos.

Vinal continues,

—Right. Pappy's been around chickens too long, got feathers for brains. . .

Pappy to Mark,

—You see what I mean? Some cahn't take the strain. . . It's sad when a young buck like Vinal heah goes wacky. . . but then,. . . he wahn't much ta staht with *enn*yways. They say—now don't go tellin, this is confidential—they say he was bahn with a little knick of a brain, a black fly's brain, fell out his eah when he stahted pickin'. . .

The verbal sparring begins anew.

The room filling now. Workers of all ages enter. Dusty mackinaws, grimy ski jackets, green rubber boots, two and three day beards. Men mill about smoking, shouting greetings, friendly insults. The machines swallow coins, cough cigarettes, purr drinks. Someone with a clipboard comes to the doorway and bellows,

—Okay! Let's go. Into the trucks.

Silence and then a sullen, reluctant rustle as the group drifts to the door, buttoning, zipping their clothes shut. The foreman's big hand on Mark's shoulder,

—You the new man?

—Yeah.

Beefy fingers grip deltoids, appraising,

—Pappy, take this fellow on your crew. Drake's replacement.

Company time. They trudge outside, into the clear blue evening. The snow squeaking at their boots, they form groups and climb into campers on the back of pick-up trucks. Mark, following the old man, is the last one in. The men inside sit motionless. There will be no heat in the small cabin but for the breathing of their bodies. Thickly clad, even the slightest among them seem heavy set.

Wilmot slaps Mark on the knee,

—Made it onta the best crew. This here's the guy you're replacing. . . Hey hippie!. . . the new man.

PAUL GARCIA lives in Boston, teaches in the public schools, and has had a number of other "unrelated" occupations.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pony-tailed fellow turns, smiles with good teeth, offers his hand,

—Name's Drake.

—Hullo.

—Gladdameetcha. You've probably heard, this here's my last night. . .

And, now, to the others in the cabin,

—God, I hope I never see you guys again.

—Oh yeah? Goin back ta Texas?

—Damn straight. It'll take a month for my bones to thaw. . .

The truck jerks forward. The group is silent for a while.

An old voice,

—Cold last night.

—Ayuh, coldah tanight.

The older men know the cold, are patient. Actually, all but the Texan are made mute by bad weather. Most curse the cold carefully, with respect. . . The truck rolling now, a couple of fellows attempt to seal off the wind leaking in, others pour coffee, sip cautiously against the unexpected bumps and turns.

Drake, as the truck takes a violent bump, spills coffee over his knees, shouts,

—SHIT! What's the fuckin hurry?

Others, though grinning, nod, they *do* drive these trucks fast—but what is there to be done? Not much is said during an hour's ride into the hills. . .

The stars are already fat when the trucks arrive at the first farm, the snowfields glowing, sparkling. Early evening and already fifteen below. A wind whistles harmonies through the skeletal winter woods, whirls rushing across a corrugated field, lifting snow vapor in its wake, seems to rise and throw itself specifically at the men clambering from the camper.

—Son of a whore!

—I jus' froze my pecker off—ennybody see it in the snow?

Welcoming the wind after the enclosure, Mark admires the starry sky, follows the others hurrying to the first coop: a two-storied metal structure some five hundred feet long. Tramping snow from their boots, all trail behind the farmer up a narrow wooden staircase. But at the top of the stairs he turns to the group: this is his crop, he wants no dead birds. . .

Most half listen, this a customary preliminary. The foreman assures the farmer. They talk mostly French, the farmer nervous, concerned: these pickup crews, sometimes they are rough, mishandle the chicken. . . The crew silent. The foreman, growing impatient,

—You're getting a good enough rate. You know the contract. Company ain't gonna pay for no moreybund bahds. Let's waste no moah TIME! We got a LONG night ahead of us. . .

The farmer backs off from the impending foreman's stout approach, muttering, admits the men into the first room: about 100 by 300 feet, small red bulbs on the heat-saving low ceiling barely illuminating the 30,000 broilers asleep on the floor. As other teams of pickers proceed into the long building, the crew of six fans out across the room. They spread out evenly, wading through the unbroken white-feathered mass, dragging their feet with a skiing motion through the snowy warmth of chicken lofting about their boots. They stand waiting. Large trucks are heard approaching, double clutching into the low range axles. It's almost eighty degrees in here, Mark feels pinpricks of sweat beginning on his neck and forehead. The chicken sleep at his feet, disturbed by his movement, not wanting to be wakened. Beginning to muse on this he's distracted by the roar of a truck motor just outside. People shouting, banging on the other side of the wall. A panel falls away leaving a large square opening through which an empty crate is thrown in, on top of some birds, and there appears a bundled and jovial fellow in the window.

—What the Christ you guys DOIN in theyah? Le's go, gawdammit, it's COLD out heah!

Immediately, as though a switch has been thrown, the men begin to work. Imitating the others, Mark stoops, begins grabbing birds by the claws, four birds in each hand. Groggy, they complain feebly, kick weakly in his grip, half flap. He stuffs them into a crate which is yanked outside and stacked with others on the truck. It seems easy enough: hands outspread, palms downward, floating over the floor through warm feathers to folded claws, fix a pair of the scaley legs between two fingers and make a fist. With some running he's able to keep up with the rest. The birds stiffen in the cold draft at the window. Confused. Like hung-over drunks being hustled into the police van for Sunday morning special session at the court house. He stuffs them into the crate, with one eye watches the rest of the crew. They work well together. Like fine gears spinning. One leaves as the other appears, fills a fresh crate. No waiting. No hurrying. A simple, inexorable movement, neither fast nor slow. He studies the others, adjusts to their rhythm. . .

Drake acknowledges his proficiency by laughing, looking at him, shouting to the others,

—Christ, this new guy's gonna replace ALL of us!

—Oh my goodness! Where will I ever find another job like *this*?

Vinal Doucette, lanky, reserved, grins,

—. . . gettin it quick all right. . .

Pappy nods encouragement. Drake continues,

—It took me a *week* to do four-in-hand. . .

And Doucette,

—That's cause you're a gawdamn cracker. . .

They begin insulting, bragging, arguing. Like singing, it makes the work easier.

The activity stirs the flock into a cranky wakedness. They resist the pickers, scratch, pull their legs away. One that Mark carries raises its head to peck at his hand and he shakes it down, forearm straining for the effort. Dust rises to the ceiling. Some fix kerchieves to their faces, others pull the collars of turtlenecks over their mouths as the fine dust of ammonia rises, an acrid, thickening cloud. Mark's sweaty face and neck grow muddy with the clinging grit. Eyes stinging, lungs burning, he revels in the work, the physical challenge, the call for endurance, but remembers to hold back, to pace himself with the others. This, until, three such coops done, four hours of stooping for thousands of birds, there is lunch.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outside the cold air, sharp, slips easily into his lungs. He washes his face with snow, follows the others into the camper. His arms hangs like weights from his shoulders, semi-conscious, numb. Inside the men unwrap sandwiches, attack their lunches. Too weary for an appetite, Mark nibbles at his sandwich for whatever strength it may contribute, sits stunned as the crew celebrates its break. . .

—Whatcha got theyah?

—Camera. Wanna take some pitchers o' y'all. Otherwise they'd never believe me back home.

—Take *my* pitcha.

Vinal Doucette, still wearing his field jacket from the Vietnamese campaign, Fu Manchu mustache, face coated with the caked sulfur-colored dust, sweat-streaked, poses with chin out, back straight, exaggerated, part military, part old Yankee dignity. The bulb flashes, its burnt smell tints the air . . .

—Cigarette?

Mark accepts the Pall Mall, once in a while won't hurt, lodges it between two numb, bent fingers. His arms respond weakly, hardly under his control and he drops the smoke. Fumbling with the sides of his hands, he grabs it from the floor. Using both arms, he raises the cigarette to his face, notices that the others surreptitiously watch, silently appraise his condition. The truck starts and most light cigarettes as it bounces along the dirt road to the next farm where trucks loaded with empty crates are already waiting. No one says anything about the work just finished. They enjoy this break, talk about times, places distant from this present. Mark is unable to talk. At the end of his arm the cigarette burns and he watches the smoke.

Drake returns the camera to the pocket of his ski jacket. Later, he announces, he will get some 'action' photos, will take them toward the end of the night's work, when they will be their most haggard, their most grimy and dust-covered best. . .

He deems them 'a rare breed of sufferin assholes' and they discount his talk with shrugs, with wry glances to one another, sly grins suppressing laughter. This college student, let him finish the night and go. We'll talk about *him* someday, maybe. And look at this new one. Never make the night. Gawdamn shame. . .

At the next farm, but for an anxious excitement, Drake continues as he has for months past. A simple mechanical gesture. He works, as they all do, like a robot, his attention elsewhere, but for him the important matter is that of keeping the talk alive, of leave-taking, of describing sunny Texas. *Big*, sunny Texas,

—. . . eat ostriches down there. Tried growin some o these. . . protozoa y'all call chicken. Sparrows kept killin 'em. Why, you go out where there's steers, you go out on the range, where the land's stretched out straight, wide open spaces, not all wrinkled up like. . .

—Only thing wide open 'bout Texas be yaw gawdamn yappin *mouth*.

Drake incited, but struck down, temporarily at a loss,

—Hell. Damn you *too!* Couple o good Texas cowboys 'd drive the whole passel you Mainiacs into New Hampshire.

—Those of us that they'll *take!*

—Yip yip yoo move along little dogies. . .

Drake's hands and arms concern themselves with the harvest. He doesn't look at the birds. His left hand burns He has picked up one sick with diarrhea, drops it, wipes his greasy hand on the paper-white backs of other birds, continues work, quietly now, his gruff, harsher manner with the birds betraying restless, sullen thoughts, condemnation of these damn ignorant. . . but, petulance soon waning into fond recollections of the barbecues and Lone Star at home, chicken frieds and four alarm chili, the good ole boys. . . rancor washes, and at the start of the second tier Drake thinks it best to take a picture before the air becomes too dust-laden. He makes a trip to the crate and, after unloading the birds, stands by the window, watches the men stooped in the dim red light. They seem only part human, gorillas, morlocks engaged in some dark, somber ritual. They walk bent over so as not to have to reach far, not to have to carry the birds far from the floor. The best pickers waste no energy, can, if they have to, work well into the next day . . .

He removes the camera, searches for a subject. The faces are blank, entranced, those of slaves, unaware, lost in work. He catches Pappy's ancient frame in the viewfinder,

—Hey Pap!

The bulb flashes a white-feathered semi-circle and for a ten foot radius the birds explode awake. They jump up flapping. Concentric ripples flowing outward, the shock of panic passes through the entire flock. Now alert and shrieking, they begin to flood like waves of rough water throughout the coop. Like the individual cells of a single animal in spasms. They leap into the air and fight whatever they touch. Their behavior is being directed by instinct and this reaction, this fit of panic is a specific protection: to flee will insure the flock's survival. With ancestral memory, as though free on the earth's surface, they try to scatter. But their defense is obsolete; their movement is restricted by the walls and they rush in strong currents though the coop. Encysted. They pool in the corners, climb over one another for escape, pile up two and three feet deep, like snow drifts against the walls. . .

The men try to break into them, to prevent the clustering by tearing into the piles, throwing chickens over their backs, but they know there's not much that can be done. The respiration of birds is rapid and they suffocate quickly. These fierce efforts by the pickers here at the end of the night are largely a gesture for the farmer, so that he might not say that they have stood idly. . .

The lights are turned off and when the birds have calmed there are several hundred that have smothered. Everyone exhausted by the heightened effort, the unfortunate excitement. . .

Drake is peremptorily fired but permitted to keep warm working outside, passing crates on the trucks. The crew silently, with only a few arrested giggles, finish the coop as the company foreman and the farmer count dead birds. . .

Wilmot calls to the foreman that he send Mark, also, to work outside. Ordinarily it would be construed as punishment, so few prefer it on such cold nights, but it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now shows that Mark's unaccustomed arms will no longer carry on the picking work, can no longer heft the twenty-five pound loads. His forearms, biceps, are wooden, unresponsive. He continues to work, dragging the birds until his hands begin to cramp, refuse to grab. Muscles knotted, fingers locked and tangling, he is sent outside to catch strays, the few which have gotten loose. . .

Mark feels the cold in his eyes. Tears congeal in the corners as though his eyes might freeze in their sockets. Eyelids—warm blood coursing through capillaries—chill and he must hold mittened hands to his face to warm them. The cold attacks, or rather, passively sucks, withdraws from him the life heat. Only by scurrying after the strays is he able to keep warm. He hobbles like an old man, chasing these stupid creatures which, their first time in the snow, wondrous at the sensation of cold, of unoccupied space around them, peck at their own feet. . . Pursuing the strange, lost birds he wonders: they have never seen the sun, eat the electric-lit day long at the constant, prescribed seventy eight degrees, fall to sleep when the lights click off. . .

—Hey!

Mark looks up. Another flashbulb pops. It's Drake on top of the truck. Laughing. Chicken flap in the crates beneath him, upset, fussing and bitching in their almost language. Mark shakes his head, begins jogging after one of the clucking fool creatures wandering into the woods. . .

Men atop the crates shouting to one another,

—Last crate?

—That the one you been waitin faw?

—THEYah she be.

—That's IT!

After sealing the empty coop, Drake and two others jump down from the truck, begin to secure the crates. Drake slaps Mark on the back and runs off to the camper. Mark runs after, let the bird go, good luck to it. . .

The others return, charge in to escape the wind, eager for their thermoses. Mark, feeling better, cramps eased by the fresh air, asks about the birds. . .

—Well, they go to the fahm when they're about a day or two old. They don't so't em by sex way they do otha bahds. 'Course they won't mature ennyways. Not broilahs. . . Broilah weighs. . . oh, 'bout six pounds live weight, somethin like that. . . Takes about six weeks to get them to that weight. That about right, Albeht?

Albert is the acknowledged 'chicken man.' Studying to be a government poultry inspector, maybe a vet someday. Raises his own birds. Puffing on his pipe, laconic, reluctant to talk,

—That's abo't right.

Mark prods him for more,

—Doesn't seem like much time, six weeks. . .

Albert sucks on his pipe a moment,

—'T's not.

He takes another haul on the pipe and, just when it seems he's not going to say any more, continues,

—Used ta, few yeahs ago, used ta take twelve, fifteen *weeks* grow a broilah.

Mark waits. Albert goes on,

—They be *healthy* bahds too! Not sickly. . .

Now he's done talking.

Mark primes him again,

—What do you mean 'sickly'?

Albert eyes him,

—Oh I could talk about *bahds*. . .

The others in the camper get into it,

—Oh Christ! Don't get *him* stahted. . .

—Hey, you wanna know about birds, this guy knows anythin. . .

—That's why they call him 'chicken man'. Frank Perdue calls him for advice. . .

Albert laughing, retreating, shy. He won't say anymore.

They begin to rib Drake.

—Hey Linwood, who was that takin the family pohtraits back theyah?

—Waall, I'm not shoowah. . . Some rubbahneckah, guess. . .

They address him directly,

—Hey Drake, hear you're into photography. . .

—Haaayaaa! Hohohoooo. . .

Runny-nosed Drake tries to ignore them, ward off the subject, tells Mark,

—You know these birds are artificial?

Mark,

—What do you mean?

—Artificial. They wouldn't have evolved on their own.

Wilmot, somber, offers,

—Synthetic chicken.

—Right! Synthetic chicken discovered by some big poultry research center over in New Hampshire. . . It wouldn't have come about if not for. . . who, Albert?

—Intehcession of modehn avian biology.

This baroque pronunciation from Albert breaks up the camper, strikes all of the occupants,

—Aw shit, here we go again. . .

—WhoWEE! You TELL 'em Albeht. . .

But he doesn't shy off. The discussion may interest him, though he'd never show it. He declares,

—YESsih!

and as though he were testifying in a high court,

—Genetics. These new bahds grow fastah, eat less. You get mawfa less.

Drake,

—'More for less'. Heard *that* one before?

Albert tells about how the original synthetic chicken, top heavy for its large, protein-rich breast, could barely walk without falling and sliding along its keelbone. It would have made for a bruised, unsellable commodity. However, so much protein per pound, feathers so easily removed at the processing plant. . . from the human perspective it was an ideal bird to develop—were it only able to reproduce. But sterile as a mule, a dead end, it had to be bred with naturally occuring types. And then there were health problems—emphysema; a persistent leucosis; diarrhea; various septicemias. . . None of which are especially noticed in the public market, but, what here seems to condemn this commercial strain,

Wilmot asks Mark,

—You ever see these birds turned loose?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He thinks of the one escaped into the woods, but nods 'no.'

—They die right away.

—Seagulls catch 'em.

Seagulls? Mark protests,

—Seagulls don't kill chicken. . .

Faces fall. Challenge. You don't doubt a man. . .

Pap, protective, helping,

—Shooowah. Seagull sees a chicken, jus' stahts ta peckin at 'im. Eats 'im. They'h not *real* bahds ennyways.

Wilmot, peaceably,

—Sure. Not like *fowl*, not like they could support themselves, live in the wild. . .

The group falls silent for a while.

—Radio says thirty-three below.

—Least the wind's died.

Prob'ly coldah up ta Bain's Fahm. . .

And at the final stop, at four in the morning, the early rising farmer Bain, refreshed by sleep, brightly greets this dusty, haggard lot,

—Hey, you boys ready foh some *wohk?*

Some muttering but mostly a bold, cheerful response,

—We're not too busy. Whatchu got?

He lets the foreman answer. The foreman, spotlighted, tired from this problem night, sighs,

—Okay. We got some fowl to load.

Whatever cheeky pluck, whatever bit of audacity, expires. Silent, glum acceptance. Mark notices the sharp drop in morale, turns to Drake.

—What's up?

Drake, too, has abandoned his last night jubilance.

—You'll see.

Fowl are roosters. As the crew enters the first room where thirty or so roost there is a din of crowing, flapping. Almost dawn, they are wide awake, cocky, belligerent. In no way docile. And though most scatter in all directions, those at the top of the pecking order stand and fight, peck and claw at outstretched hands. Here temerity and speed are called for. Mark watches as Pappy and Drake walk crouched, arms out, try to corral, chase one of the larger creatures toward Vinal. It leaps, flaps, runs between them. They try again, back it against the wall. Pappy slowly approaches and with one quick movement grabs it by the yellow, scaley, waxen legs, throws it into a crate, explaining to idle Mark,

—These be tough bastahds now, watch out faw theih spuhs. . .

Mark reluctant. They must weigh a good fifteen pounds or more. He follows one to a corner. It eyes him as though daring further approach. Mark pauses, plans his move, grabs, catches it by one leg and the animal flies off with his arm,

—Hang *on* Wright brothah. . .

—Get the *othah* leg!

—Watch your eyes now. . .

He has a good grip on it but can see only a blur of wings and, then, the other leg, kicking, clawing at his fist, grabs it, pushes it into the grip he has on the first leg. The bird is manic with rage, swooping to Jupiter, scooping air, throwing itself away.

—The crate!

—Put 'im inna crate!

He runs with this pecking, crowing, flapping demon to a crate, forces him in.

Laughter.

—Di'n't look like you were gonna *get* 'm!

—A'most stuffed *you* in the crate!

Mark grins, shaken, proud,

—How'd I do?

Only grins for an answer. And turned heads. His hand stings. Cuts across the knuckles, long tears along the back of his hand. . .

Wilmot,

—You had tetanus shots?

—Don't know.

The foreman hears this, calls,

—You! New man, c'mere!

He looks at Mark's hand.

—There's a sink over where we came in. Wash that hand, and then, uh . . . lay off the fowl . . . Too cold to wo'k outside. . . Here. Stack these crates inside the windah, make sure you have one ready and open while they stuff 'em in. . .

They'll be done after this last coop but here it's a furious disordered scramble to catch these tough, angry, randy, soup birds. Feathers float in the air. Then there is only the evasive, reluctant final bantam. The men all chase him,

—Get 'im. Get 'im. Get 'im.

—Ow. Son of a whore. . .

With a deft flick, Vinal snaps its neck, tosses it limp and twitching at the crate. Drake pushes it in,

—Let's go get some breakfast.

Pale morning. Bleak. It won't get any colder now. Mark punches out at the plant, notes the rows of semi trailers tall with the shivering, somnolent, crated birds, buff-colored with dust. . . The smells of chicken and meat spoiling. . . He joins the crew at Pearl's, the usual breakfast place, where they sit along the back wall, segregated in their booths. No one wants them at the counter. They're obvious cuts below the small town working class perched on stools. Everyone knows who they are. Covered with dust and chicken feathers, not noticing the urine-like smell of poultry they've brought in, kidding one another, shouting from one table to the next, they are in high contrast to the sedate, sane from sleep customers along the counter. A fading blonde in red bell bottoms which are too tight, too short and baggy-kneed, enters with her beau. The crew falls mock serious. Murmurs of approval. She, balanced between flattery and disgust, sits, head held a little too high at a counter stool. Her friend also sits, nervous-eyed, looking nowhere. . . Violet, the grandmotherly, starched white as a nurse waitress, her expression of stern disapproval at the boys' behavior collapsing into a smirk, pours coffee for the crew, and when she waddles off with their orders Drake produces a half pint of bourbon from his down jacket, begins to lace the coffees.

—Dammit! What *else* you got in that jacket?

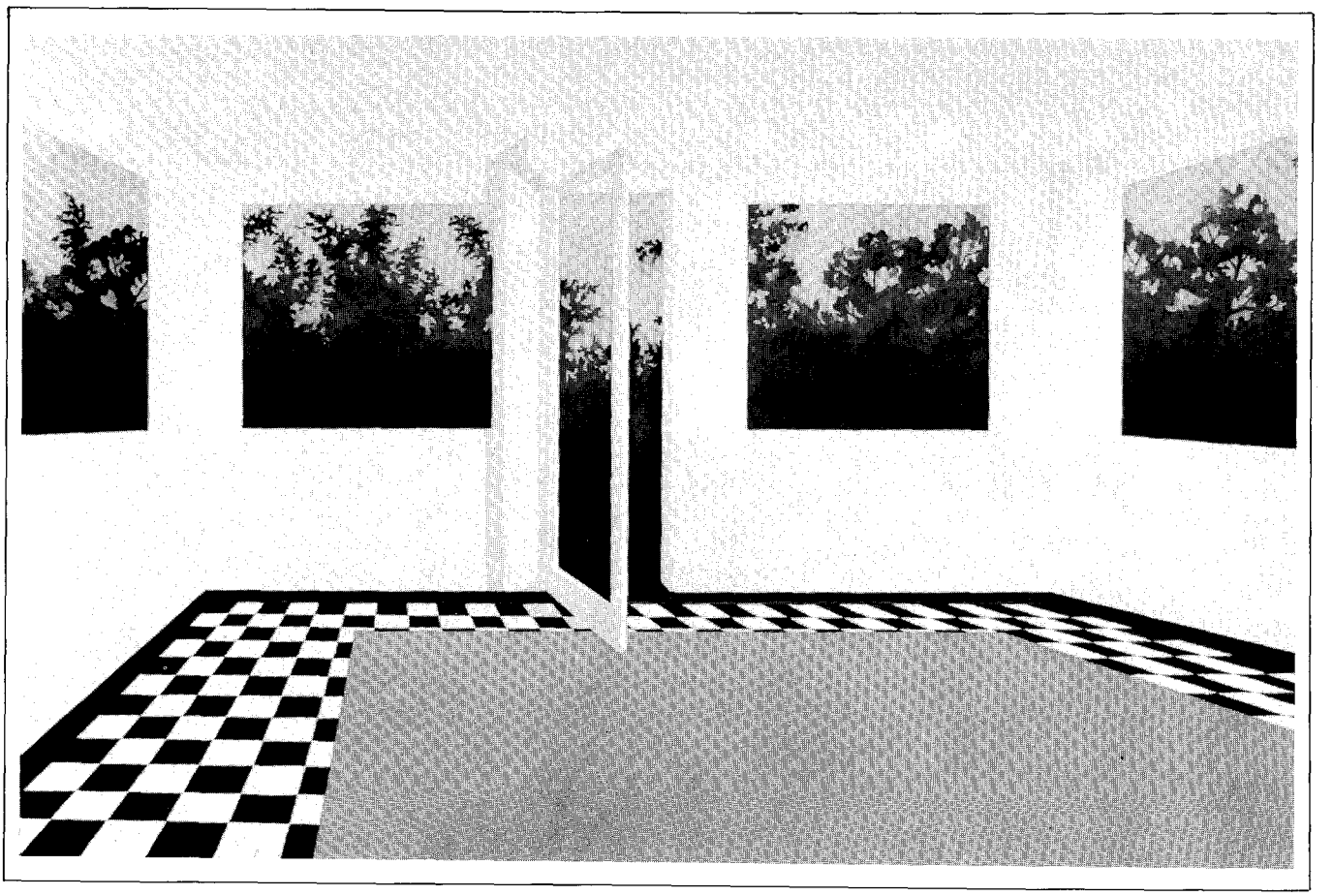
—YESsih!

—Always remembeh good ole Wide Open Spaces Drake. . . □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CAROL ADORJAN

THE ROOM WITH THE VIEW



Is this the room with the view?" the Old Woman asks.

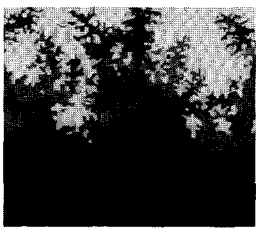
"The best room in the house," her daughter answers.

And it is. It had been a sleeping porch when they moved in, with casement windows on three sides—eleven in all—too cold in winter, too hot in summer. They had torn it open, stuffed insulation into its sides and closed it up again with three picture windows, two on the west, one on the south.

"Like living in a treehouse," the daughter says. She had planned to take it for herself. Make it a study. A place where she could lock herself away from the children. Be alone whenever she wanted or needed, before, like her mother, she was too old and could no longer be alone though she might still feel the need.

"Yes," the Old Woman says. "Trees."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"There's room for them here. In the backyard next door, five trees. Enormous trees! Do you see them?"

"Yes."

"And still room for badminton. Better than where you were. Nothing to look at but parking spaces."

"People coming and going."

"Well, yes. Cars. But no trees. No view. Nothing. You never liked it there. You always said you didn't like it there. You'll see. You'll like this better." She helps her mother into bed, a studio couch on the wall away from the windows. "Do you need anything?"

"Need?"

"Can I get you anything?"

"Nothing." The Old Woman's eyes are already closed. "I have all I need."

"Rest," her daughter tells her. "I'll be downstairs." She retreats, closing the door behind her.

She unpacks some of her mother's things. The cut glass bowl (she saw one exactly like it in an antique store window just the other day: one hundred and twenty-five dollars); some pots and pans—handles loose; a dimestore pottery pair of praying children.

"Where are the children?" the Old Woman asks.

"At school."

"School? They never go to school."

"Five days a week. Thank God."

"They've never gone before."

"They're older now."

"They never change."

"It only seems that way because they are changing all the time."

"They always sat there before on that table. That is my table?"

"Yes. Your table. All the things in this room are yours."

"They look different."

"It's the room. The room is different."

"And the children are gone."

"Ahhh! *Those* children." The daughter retrieves the praying figures from the back of a kitchen cabinet and sets them on her mother's drum table.

The Old Woman smiles.

"Did you see the birds in the yard this morning?" the Old Woman asks.

Her daughter arranges the breakfast on the table by the window: a soft-boiled egg, oatmeal, coffee. She keeps an ear on the children in the kitchen. "Birds?"

"Never saw so many. Blackbirds. Blue-black like my hair. Once. When I was young. There on the lawn. One of them—"

"Crows? Here?"

"Blackbirds."

The daughter glances out the window. She sees the burned-out spots of lawn where the dog has peed and the trucks and bikes the children have neglected to put away. "There are no crows here."

"They flew away when you came. A dark cloud in the sky."

At lunch, the old woman asks about the wash on the line.

"Whose line?" her daughter asks. "No one hangs out wash in this neighborhood." She has made a round cream cheese sandwich, using a glass to cut away the crust as her mother had done for the child she had been.

"Over that way."

"I don't see anything. Trees."

"Beyond the trees. See it there."

"It's a picket fence. What you see is the white of a fence."

"Nothing whitens like the sun."

The daughter gathers her mother's wash: soiled handkerchiefs and stained slips and long, loose pants. She pours bleach into the machine straight from the bottle without measuring.

In the beginning, the Old Woman comes downstairs for supper. But the children are noisy and she cannot tell whether the confusion is inside her head or at the table. And there is no window in the corner where they put her.

"I will stay here," she tells her daughter. "In this room with the view."

The daughter is relieved. The children are enough.

At sunset, there are parties everywhere. Beautiful people dressed in beautiful clothes—flashes of color floating among the darkening green of the trees.

In the morning, when her daughter brings the breakfast on a tray, hurrying so she spills coffee into the saucer, the Old Woman says, "Last night it was all lit up over that way."

"West."

"Like a fairyland. Little lights in all the trees. People coming and going. Women in beautiful long dresses."

"Where did you say they were?"

"Over that way. The most beautiful sight."

No street nor yard is visible beneath the wall of thickening trees.

"Is it something you dreamed?" the daughter asks.

"Oh, no. Real. I saw them as clearly as I see you now."

The Old Woman has covered the uneaten oatmeal

CAROL ADORJAN is from Illinois, writes stories and plays. This is her second appearance in the NAR.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with her crumpled napkin. The daughter pretends not to notice.

The daughter pushes the vacuum with short hurried strokes. Her mother's mouth moves silently. She switches off the vacuum.

"Don't those men look funny?"

"Which men?"

"Those men working over there on that hill-like thing."

"All I see is trees."

"Beyond the trees."

"You can't see beyond the trees."

"Oh, yes. I see them there. Working like ants on that hill."

"Only trees. The movement of the trees."

"I don't suppose it matters. We'll have nothing to do with them anyway."

The daughter finishes the room and leaves hastily. There is so much work to be done.

"Look at all those people. Another party."

The daughter has bathed her mother and is powdering the sagging breasts and buttocks, the spindly legs and arms. "Next door?"

"No. No. Further down. Sailors. They look like sailors. They are sailors. Your father was a sailor."

"There's no one there." The daughter gathers the clothes that smell of urine and decay and starts out, holding the bundle away from her.

The Old Woman sighs. "It's a lovely day for a party. I hope they have a good time."

"Is there a religious group next door?"

"A religious group?"

"Yes. You know. A church or something."

"No. Only the neighbors. And they're away."

"Didn't you hear them last night? Late."

"No. I heard nothing. Slept the sleep of the—" The daughter swallows the last word, tasting its bitterness.

"There were all these people next door. Sitting in a circle under the trees. Singing. Beautiful music. Choir music. They were black. It was beautiful."

"There was someone in the yard this afternoon."

"Who?"

"I don't know. A stranger. A woman."

"No stranger: me. I was spreading grass seed on the bare spots. The dog's ruined the lawn."

"She took the children."

"Don't I wish!"

"She did. While I was sleeping."

"They went off to play."

"Not your children."

"Whose then?"

"Those children. The ones on the table."

"The figurines? They're there. No one took them."

"They came back. She put them back."

The daughter is silent searching her experience for an explanation. "A reflection. You saw their reflection in the window and thought they were outside."

"She laughed about it. Took the children and laughed. I heard her."

"What are those men doing in the trees?"

"Where?"

"Everywhere. In all the trees."

"I don't see them."

"No. They're gone now. But they were there. It looked as though they were . . . polishing the leaves. And they had those things—those boxes the children use to talk to one another."

"Walkie-Talkies."

"Yes. And I could hear them. 'Do you need help?' they said. 'I'm near if you need me.' Very mysterious."

"Nothing mysterious about it. If they were there, I'm sure there's a simple explanation."

"When will you learn?" The Old Woman's tone is reminiscent of a time when she was The Mother and this stranger was . . . who? "There are no simple explanations. None at all."

The daughter takes the tray of partially eaten food and starts for the door. "You're not eating."

"I eat."

"A mouthful. Not enough to keep a bird alive."

The Old Woman shrugs. "The cooking here."

The daughter sees herself in grocery lines, lugging home bags of fresh fruit and vegetables, prime cuts of meat, arms aching, bending over the stove; feels the steam rise up to cloud her vision and make ragged ropes of her hair. She laughs.

The jagged edge of sound cuts into the Old Woman. She winces with the pain of knowing she has said the wrong thing. She cannot remember how to make it right.

The Old Woman no longer eats—not a jot to sustain her. The daughter, legs weary from carrying trays up the stairs, returning them untouched, grows impatient.

"You must eat," she says.

"I'm not hungry," her mother says.

"The doctor says no pills on an empty stomach. How can I give you your pills if you don't eat?"

"There isn't time. There is too much to see."

She sits motionless before the windows, her eyes fixed in such a way that she appears to her daughter to be looking inward, studying some secret interior landscape. And she does not report the things she has seen.

She says only, "This is a lovely room. I have always liked a room with a view."

There comes a night when she says nothing. Her daughter pulls down the shades and stays with the Old Woman through the deepest dark, closeted away from the children and the sounds of their dreaming.

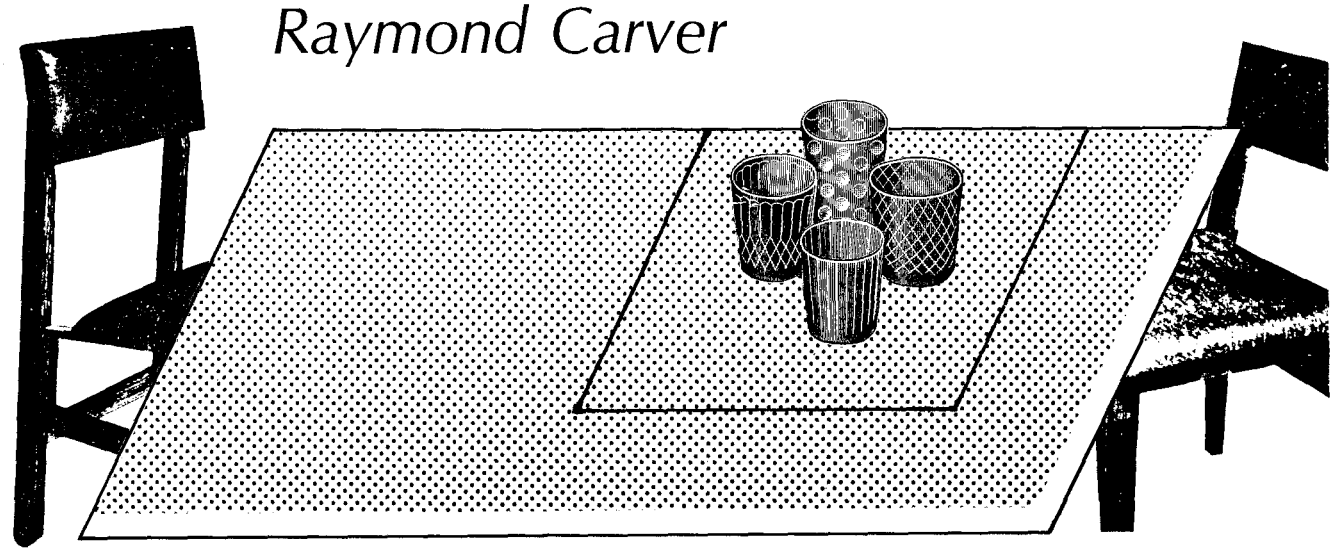
At dawn, the daughter raises the shades. She stands at the window, her hands pressed against the glass, watching the blackbirds—more than she has ever seen—pecking at the grass seed.

"Look," she says. "Birds. So many birds," but the Old Woman has slipped away, gone beyond the trees where her daughter's vision cannot yet penetrate. □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ONE MORE THING

Raymond Carver



L. D.'s wife Maxine told him to leave one night after she came home from work and found him drunk again and being abusive with Bea, their fifteen year old. L.D. and his daughter were at the kitchen table, arguing. Maxine didn't have time to put her purse away or take off her coat.

Bea said, "Tell him, Mom. Tell him what we talked about. It's in his head, isn't it? If he wants to stop drinking, all he has to do is tell himself to stop. It's all in his head. Everything's in the head."

"You think it's that simple, do you?" L.D. said. He turned the glass in his hand but didn't drink from it. Maxine had him in a fierce and disquieting gaze. "That's crap," he said. "Keep your nose out of things you don't know anything about. You don't know what you're saying. It's hard to take anybody seriously who sits around all day reading astrology magazines."

"This has nothing to do with *astrology*, Dad," Bea said. "You don't have to insult me." Bea hadn't attended high school for the past six weeks. She said no one could make her go back. Maxine had said it was another tragedy in a long line of tragedies.

"Why don't you both stop?" Maxine said. "My God, I already have a headache. This is just too much. L.D.?"

"Tell him, Mom," Bea said. "Mom thinks so too. If you tell yourself to stop, you can stop. The brain can do anything. If you worry about going bald and losing your hair—I'm not talking about you, Dad—it'll fall out. It's all in your head. Anybody who knows anything about it will tell you."

"How about sugar diabetes?" he said. "What about epilepsy? Can the brain control that?" He raised the glass right under Maxine's eyes and finished his drink.

"Diabetes, too," Bea said. "Epilepsy. Anything! The brain is the most powerful organ in the body. It can do anything you ask it to do." She picked up his cigarettes from the table and lit one for herself.

"Cancer. What about cancer?" L.D. said. "Can it stop you from getting cancer? Bea?" He thought he might have her there. He looked at Maxine. "I don't know how we got started on this," he said.

"Cancer," Bea said and shook her head at his simplicity. "Cancer, too. If a person wasn't afraid of getting cancer, he wouldn't get cancer. Cancer starts in the *brain*, Dad."

"That's crazy!" he said and hit the table with the flat of his hand. The ashtray jumped. His glass fell on its side and rolled toward Bea. "You're crazy, Bea, do you know that? Where'd you pick up all this crap? That's what it is too. It's crap, Bea."

"That's enough, L.D.," Maxine said. She unbuttoned her coat and put her purse down on the counter. She looked at him and said, "L.D., I've had it. So has Bea. So has everyone who knows you. I've been thinking it over. I want you out of here. Tonight. This minute. And I'm doing you a favor, L.D. I want you out of the house now before they come and carry you out in a pine box. I want you to leave, L.D. Now," she said. "Someday you'll look back on this. Someday you'll look back and thank me."

L.D. said, "I will, will I? Someday I'll look back," he said. "You think so, do you?" L.D. had no intention of

---

RAYMOND CARVER's new story collection, What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, *is due shortly from Knopf. He teaches at Syracuse University.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going anywhere, in a pine box or otherwise. His gaze switched from Maxine to a jar of pickles that had been on the table since lunch. He picked up the jar and hurled it past the refrigerator through the kitchen window. Glass shattered onto the floor and windowsill and pickles flew out into the chill night. He gripped the edge of the table.

Bea had jumped away from her chair. "*God,* Dad! *You're* the crazy one," she said. She stood beside her mother and took in little breaths through her mouth.

"Call the police," Maxine said. "He's violent. Get out of the kitchen before he hurts you. Call the police," she said.

They started backing out of the kitchen. For a moment L.D. was insanely reminded of two old people retreating, the one in her nightgown and robe, the other in a black coat that reached to her knees.

"I'm going, Maxine," he said. "I'm going right now. It suits me to a tee. You're nuts here anyway. This is a nuthouse. There's another life out there. Believe me, this is not the only life." He could feel the draft of air from the window on his face. He closed his eyes and opened them. He still had his hands on the edge of the table and was rocking the table back and forth on its legs as he spoke.

"I hope not," Maxine said. She'd stopped in the kitchen doorway. Bea edged around her into the other room. "God knows, every day I pray there's another life."

"I'm going," he said. He kicked his chair and stood up from the table. "You won't see me again, either."

"You've left me plenty to remember you by, L.D.," Maxine said. She was in the living room now. Bea stood next to her. Bea looked disbelieving and scared. She held her mother's coat sleeve in the fingers of one hand, her cigarette in the fingers of her other hand.

"*God*, Dad, we were just talking," she said.

"Go on now, get out, L.D.," Maxine said. "I'm paying the rent here, and I'm saying go. Now."

"I'm going," he said. "Don't push me," he said. "I'm going."

"Don't do anything else violent, L.D.," Maxine said. "We know you're strong when it comes to breaking things."

"Away from here," L.D. said. "I'm leaving this nuthouse."

He made his way into the bedroom and took one of her suitcases from the closet. It was an old brown Naugahyde suitcase with a broken clasp. She used to pack it full of Jantzen sweaters and carry it with her to college. He'd gone to college too. That had been years ago and somewhere else. He threw the suitcase onto the bed and began putting in his underwear, trousers and long-sleeved shirts, sweaters, an old leather belt with a brass buckle, all of his socks and handkerchiefs. From the nightstand he took magazines for reading material. He took the ashtray. He put everything he could into the suitcase, everything it would hold. He fastened the one good side of the suitcase, secured the strap, and then remembered his bathroom things. He found the vinyl shaving bag up on the closet shelf behind Maxine's hats. The shaving bag had been a birthday gift from Bea a year or so back. Into it went his razor and shaving cream, his talcum powder and stick deodorant, his toothbrush. He took the toothpaste too. He could hear Maxine and Bea in the living room talking in low voices. After he washed his face and used the towel, he put the bar of soap into the shaving bag. Then he added the soap dish and the glass from over the sink. It occurred to him that if he had some cutlery and a tin plate, he could keep going for a long time. He couldn't close the shaving bag, but he was ready. He put on his coat and picked up the suitcase. He went into the living room. Maxine and Bea stopped talking. Maxine put her arm around Bea's shoulders.

"This is goodbye, I guess," L.D. said and waited. "I don't know what else to say except I guess I'll never see you again," he said to Maxine. "I don't plan on it anyway. You too," he said to Bea. "You and your crackpot ideas."

"*Dad*," she said.

"Why do you go out of your way to keep picking on her?" Maxine said. She took Bea's hand. "Haven't you done enough damage in this house already? Go on, L.D. Go and leave us in peace."

"It's in your head, Dad. Just remember," Bea said. "Where are you going anyway? Can I write to you?" she asked.

"I'm going, that's all I can say," L.D. said. "Anyplace. Away from this nuthouse," he said. "That's the main thing." He took a last look around the living room and then moved the suitcase from one hand to the other and put the shaving bag under his arm. "I'll be in touch, Bea. Honey, I'm sorry I lost my temper. Forgive me, will you? Will you forgive me?"

"You've made it into a nuthouse," Maxine said. "If it's a nuthouse, L.D., you've made it so. You did it. Remember that, L.D., as you go wherever you're going."

He put the suitcase down and the shaving bag on top of the suitcase. He drew himself up and faced them. Maxine and Bea moved back.

"Don't say anything else, Mom," Bea said. Then she saw the toothpaste sticking out of the shaving bag. She said, "Look, Dad's taking the toothpaste. Dad, come on, don't take the toothpaste."

"He can have it," Maxine said. "Let him have it and anything else he wants just so long as he gets out of here."

L.D. put the shaving bag under his arm again and once more picked up the suitcase. "I just want to say one more thing, Maxine. Listen to me. Remember this," he said. "I love you. I love you no matter what happens. I love you too, Bea. I love you both." He stood there at the door and felt his lips begin to tingle as he looked at them for what, he believed, might be the last time. "Goodbye," he said.

"You call this love, L.D.?" Maxine said. She let go of Bea's hand. She made a fist. Then she shook her head and jammed her hands into her coat pockets. She stared at him and then dropped her eyes to something on the floor near his shoes.

It came to him with a shock that he would remember this night and her like this. He was terrified to think that in the years ahead she might come to resemble a woman he couldn't place, a mute figure in a long coat, standing in the middle of a lighted room with lowered eyes.

"Maxine!" he cried. "Maxine!"

"Is this what love is, L.D.?" she said, fixing her eyes on him. Her eyes were terrible and deep, and he held them as long as he could. □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Excerpt from *Water Music*

T. Coraghessan Boyle

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HEGIRA

West Africa, 1796-97. Mungo Park, having discovered the Niger River, is now faced with the problem of making it back to tell about it. The dreaded rainy season is upon him, and he has just looked on helplessly as Johnson, his guide and boon companion, sank into the ooze while clamped crosswise in the jaws of a colossal old riverine crocodile.

The loss of Johnson hit the explorer like a hammer-blow. If before the situation was grim, now it was desperate. Not only was he half-naked, starved, febrile, nauseous, penniless and lost, he suddenly found himself on his own in an alien and hostile environment—without guide, companion or fellow sufferer.

As he watched Johnson's brow sink into the muck, he lost control of himself, carrying on like a Greek housewife at the funeral of her eldest son, or a federalist, forced by luck of the draw to inscribe his name last on an historic and revolutionary document. Purely and simply, he gave way to despair. Sat down in the water and began tearing at his hair, wailing, sobbing and moaning, gnashing his teeth, rending his skin, flailing at the water with his useless knife and cursing, blaspheming, crying out against the senseless mechanism of the universe and the black arbitrary heart that oversees it. This went on for ten minutes or so, until he felt a hand on his arm. It was the refugee. Behind him, up to their knees in water, stood the little man's wife and stunted children, their faces stung with anxiety. "Come on," the man said. "There's nothing you can do here—except maybe attract another crocodile."

The man's name was Jemafoo Momadoo. Like many of the Mandingoes of the region he was a *Bushreen*, having converted to Mohammedanism under pressure from the Moors. He bowed to Mecca twice a day, abstained from pork and named his first son Isma'il—but he was no fanatic. Until the deluge he had been a tenant farmer in the village of Sooha, scraping away at the dusty soil from dawn till dusk, yanking at the desiccated yellow teats of his goats, boiling the meat from the bones of snakes, toads and rats. A week of steady rain flooded the fields around Sooha to a depth of three and a half feet. He and his wife and their wisps of children were asleep in the cane hut when the Niger swept down on them, seething and booming. The flood waters took his goats, two sons, his hut, tools and meager stock of dried legumes and rice. In return, it gave him the bloated carcasses of two wildebeest and a roan antelope.

He led the explorer back up the rise to where the pot was once again simmering over the fire. The clearing was so green it ached. "Would you like a cup of broth?" he asked.

Mungo accompanied the Momadoos to the village of Song, where Jemafoo's father-in-law was the *Dooty*. It was a two-day trek. Jemafoo was hoping to participate in the reduction of his father-in-law's larder, while Mungo, still reeling under the shock of Johnson's sudden demise and shaken with the onset of fever, welcomed the opportunity to travel anywhere, so long as it was in the right direction. (He had discovered, much to his dismay, that the failed attempt to cross the Toolumbo had resulted in his landing on the far side of the Niger, *twenty miles downriver from the point at which he'd started.* The discovery came as no surprise, actually—it was just another link in a concatenation of major setbacks and bitter disappointments that had begun with the disappearance of his seatrunk ten minutes after landing at Goree, and which had continued unabated ever since.)

The Momadoos, *en famille*, trooped into Song just after dawn, the explorer bringing up the rear. Cook fires smoldered under the light drizzle, dogs yapped, guinea hens pecked in the dirt. There was no one to be seen. Madame Momadoo, eight-and-a-half months pregnant and a native of the village, was puzzled. She peered into this hut or that, called out a time or two, then turned to her husband and shrugged her shoulders. But then she caught her breath and stood stock-still, listening. Her broad face broke into a grin. "*Mola lave akombo,*" she said. "They're singing. Listen."

The sound was faint and distant, a static in the air, a hum of the sort that announces a massing of insects—or a gathering of armies. The explorer strained his ears: it seemed to be coming from the direction of the river. He started toward it automatically, without thinking, almost as if he were under a spell. Human voices, raised in song. How long had it been? Bass and contralto, counterpoint, soaring sopranos—the sweep of voices took him back to the cavernous cathedrals of Edinburgh and the simple oak-beamed chapel of his boyhood at Fowlshiels. He found himself returning Madame Momadoo's grin.

The muddy path wound through a series of vegetable plots already burgeoning with yellow gourds, incipient watermelons, yams, cassavas, indian corn and peanuts, then dipped down a short incline to follow an earthen levee across what appeared to be a flooded rice paddy. The children scampered on ahead, thin as featherless birds, while Madame Momadoo hurried after them, her great belly jogging in time to the flash of her elbows. Mungo picked his way along carefully, quizzing Jemafoo about the local power structure, agricultural techniques, initiation rites. The music swelled in his ears.

They passed through a dark clot of vegetation that hemmed them in on all sides, then came round a bend and caught their breath—there was the Niger stretched before them, oceanic, gray with mist. Trees stood in the water like women lifting their skirts, and the riverbank was crowded with people. Brooding over the scene, like storm clouds touching down, were masses of shrieking, squabbling birds. Jemafoo's face lit up. "The *akeena* are running!" he shouted, bounding forward like a hound on the scent.

No one even glanced up when the explorer joined the

T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE has a recent short story collection, The Descent of Man; *"Hegira" is an excerpt from* Water Music, *out later this year from Atlantic-Little, Brown.*

Copyright© 1981 by T. Coraghessan Boyle

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crowd on the riverbank. They were too busy hauling at ropes, collectively drawing a huge seine across the bay before them—and singing their hearts out. "Wo-habba-wo!" chanted the men in a basso that shook the earth, dipping forward on the "habba," leaning back into the rope on the upbeat. "*Weema-woppa, weema-woppa,*" sang the women and children, while an old man, ribby but muscular, wove a snaking melody above it with all the fire and ice of a tenor at the Royal Opera House.

Mungo looked round. Madame Momadoo had joined one of the rope gangs behind her eldest son. Jemafoo stood by a mound of silver fish, each the size of a sardine, and flailed a stick at the gulls and pelicans that plunged toward the seething mass and then shot off into the sky. Each villager had his task—from the old women who tended the bonfires to the boys who ran off dogs and jackals with a barrage of stones—and yet each was attuned to the other through the rhythmic insistency of the song. Order and harmony, sang the voices, cooperation and prosperity, heave and ho. The explorer stood there like a manequin, intent on the struggle with the net, until he began to detect a change in the intensity of the music. It seemed as if the voices were about to explode, rumbling away like a stampede, when a women's voice rushed up the scale in a burst of Dionysian energy, searing and triumphant, the rhythm pulsing quicker now, driving toward a climax, thunderous—and suddenly Mungo was at the rope, tugging for all he was worth, oblivious to fever, hunger, sorrow, caught up in the emotional sweep of the thing.

The net was closing like a throat, squeezing off into a *U*, then a *V*, and all at once the water was alive with thrashing fish. Thousands leaped the net, hundreds of thousands more went deep, tangled in the mesh, and pounded the water to foam. Men waded in up to their waists, clubbing at the escaping fish, children scooped the stunned transgressors from the surface, the crowd pulled, and then it was over. The net was beached, colossal, a river of flesh.

Snakes and eels slithered for the water, fish flapped across the mudbank like acrobats. But for every potential escapee there was a quick scrawny Mandingo boy with a club. Thud-thud went the clubs, and a new song began, less insistent in its beat, slower-paced, methodical: a killing song. Not a fish escaped. Already the drying fires were roaring as women strung the little silver fish on lines and hung them out to toast. There was a perch in the catch that must have weighed over a hundred pounds, and a catfish-looking thing that could have swallowed it whole. Two men held up a turtle the size of a wagon wheel, another dragged a twelve-foot python up the bank and headed off in the direction of the village. Within minutes the turtle was shelled, dismembered and bubbling away in a pot; the perch and catfish were gutted, wrapped in leaves and tossed into a smoldering pit while a pair of marabou storks fought over the remains. Jemafoo tapped the explorer's shoulder. "Here," he said, offering one of the three-inch fish that flashed and writhed in his hand. "*Akeena.*" He was grinning encouragement, having learned from experience that all distress is food-related. "Watch—like this," he demonstrated, putting his lips to the fish's vent and squeezing it lengthwise to draw out the roe. "Go ahead, try it."

Birds were shrieking, a thick greasy smoke hung in the air. The voices of the chorus swelled and sank. Mungo lifted the fish to his lips, but when he tried to squeeze it he found that he didn't have the energy. His temples were pounding, he legs gone to rubber. He sat down and dreamed of blackness.

The fever came on with a vengeance. It left him enervated and delirious, and it was accompanied by an excoriating diarrhea that so debilitated him he couldn't even muster the energy to clean himself. For two weeks he lay on a mat in the father-in-law's hut, sweating and stinking, waking from jarring nightmares to the stark actuality of four walls on an alien planet. At intervals someone bent over him with a damp cloth, or put a wooden spoon in his mouth. An old woman offered him a potion of hammered bark: her face was an executioner's. Demons howled, strange melodies chanted in his ears. He saw the net that holds up the stars, dug to the center of the earth, floundered about the icy black depths of the sea. Rain hissed at the thatched roof, centipedes and crimson spiders crept over him, sucked at his organs, nested in his eyes. He screamed until he was hoarse. And then—as suddenly as it had come on—it left him. He could see and hear. He knew who he was.

The hut was crowded: children and adults, dogs, poultry, an old leper. Sheets of rain obscured the doorway, there was a smell of gutter and bilge. Jemafoo and his father-in-law were arguing.

"You throw all your burdens on me."

"What choice do I have? Starve your daughter and grandchildren?"

"What about him?"

"You can't turn your back on a guest."

"I didn't invite him. Nor you for that matter."

The explorer stirred, raised himself to his elbows. "I'm better now," he croaked. "Really." He stood shakily. There was nothing left of him but eyes. "If you could just give me a bite for the road . . ."

At that moment there was a cry from the far corner, an unearthly screech, a protest from another world. Madame Momadoo was surrounded by women. One of them held up a newborn infant, slick and red. It was a boy. He screeched again, a strange primal squeal compounded of terror, rage and bewilderment. But there was something else in it too: a demand.

"I can give you nothing," the father-in-law said.

The explorer gathered up his things—the tophat stuffed with notes, his walking staff, a water gourd and battered compass—and started for the door. Jemafoo stopped him and handed him a bag of dried fish, grain and tobacco.

"Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!" shrieked the baby, as if his teeth had been pulled.

The explorer stepped out into the rain.

Half a mile up the road he began to feel dizzy, sought out shelter in a lean-to fashioned from leaves the size of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overcoats, and fell asleep. When he woke, the sun was shining. He'd been told that the next town over was called Frookaboo, and that for twenty cowries you could get a Frookabooan to paddle you across the river in a dugout. So he had a choice. He could lie there in a heap of rotting leaves, or force down some dried fish and hobble up the road to Frookaboo. Indomitable, he chose to hobble.

At Frookaboo he applied to the *Dooty* for food, shelter and passage across the river. He was a scribe, he said, and could pay for his lodging by inditing potent and efficacious *safies* or charms. Then he fell asleep. The *Dooty* shook him and asked him if he was a Moor. Mungo considered the question a moment, his lids at half-mast. His beard hung below his breastbone, he was dressed in a tattered toga and sandals, his skin was yellow from sun and jaundice. He squinted up at the *Dooty*. "*La illah el allah,*" he said, "*Mahomet rasowl Allahi.*"

The explorer spent three days at Frookaboo, a guest of the *Dooty*. He ate well, slept in a dry hut, bowed to Mecca. The fever drew off a pace or two, and he began to regain some of his strength. He even found energy, for the first time in weeks, to take some notes. *I repaid the Dooty,* he wrote, *by scribbling out the Lord's Prayer for him on a bit of slate. The man was a strict Mohammedan, and thought I was writing in Arabic. I felt it expedient not to disabuse him. When I had finished, he wiped the slate clean with a wet cloth, wrung the cloth out over a cup and drank down its contents, thereby assuring himself of the maximum benefit of my words. Afterward he offered me a pipe of mutokuane and a peep beneath his wife's veil.*

On the afternoon of the third day Mungo thanked his host, scribbled off a final blessing, and limped down to the river where he found a number of ferrymen perched like water spiders in the prows of their canoes. He struck a bargain with a sloe-eyed Bobo whose skin was the color of a concord grape: six lines of inspired calligraphy in exchange for passage to Sibidooloo, on the far side of the river. The explorer felt that something out of Virgil might be appropriate—inscribed to the Charon of the Niger—but he couldn't remember a word of Latin and wound up giving him an abridged version of "The Owl and the Pussycat" instead.

There were four goats, a parrot and a cage full of monkeys in the canoe, in addition to six other passengers and a dozen earthenware jars of produce. When Mungo asked what the monkeys were for the ferryman grinned to display a gleaming mouthful of teeth. "Eat them," he said. "Make monkey bread."

Sibidooloo lay directly across the river from Frookaboo. It was, according to the ferryman, a trading town of about a thousand people. From there, he said, it was perhaps seventy-five miles to Kamalia, a slave market situated on the edge of the Jallonka Wilderness. If the explorer could make Kamalia he might be able to hook up with a slave coffle heading for the coast. It was a hope. He would have preferred a coach and four back to Pisania, but at least now he knew that there was a way back. The explorer landed at Sibidooloo in high spirits. His plan was to spend the night and leave the next morning for Kamalia. If the fever held off and the road wasn't too muddy, he should be able to make it in three or four days.

But first to the business at hand: finding some shelter for the night. The sky had begun to darken, clouds scudding low and smoky over the thatched roofs and whitewashed walls of the town. Thunder rumbled in the distance, and the air had suddenly cooled. It was probably raining in Frookaboo already. The explorer hurried up a narrow street of well-kept mud-and-wattle huts, occasionally looking in at a doorway and asking for shelter. After two or three rebuffs, he stopped before a hut where a woman in kerchief and hoop earrings was suckling an infant and preparing kouskous with bits of *akeena*. He greeted her, then pulled a slip of paper from his hat, dashed off a couple of lines from *Abercrombie's Art of Divine Converse*, and handed it to her. She glanced up suspiciously. "You a *marabout?*"

He didn't know what to say. *Marabouts* were Moslem holy men who travelled from town to town, dispensing learning. It seemed like a good thing to admit to, yet why the strange look? He opted for insincerity. "That I am," he said.

She put the infant down, and called to someone in the hut. "Flancharee," she said. "Come here."

A tall Mandingo in a pair of baggy shorts stepped from the hut, flanked by two Moors. Mungo's heart sank. The Moors were dressed in dirty white *jubbahs* and *kaffiyehs*. Somehow, one of them looked familiar.

"This man claims to be a *marabout,*" the woman said. "Look what he wrote on this paper."

Flancharee and the Moors squinted at the quotation from Abercrombie. Then one of the Moors looked the explorer dead in the eye and said something in Arabic. Mungo didn't know what to answer. The Moor repeated himself. It sounded as if he were saying "Your mother eats pig."

"He's no *marabout,*" Flancharee said in Mandingo.

The second Moor stepped forward. His skin was baked to leather, his nose twisted like a scythe—but worst of all, the explorer realized with a cold shock of recognition, his left eye socket was empty. "No Mussulman," the Moor hissed in broken Mandingo. "Nazarini!"

"Imposter!" rumbled the woman.

Flancharee took hold of the explorer's arm.

"He's a thief," the first Moor said. "He took from Ali and crawled off in the night like a worm. Dassoud is offering four prime slaves for him, enough to make a man rich."

"Nazarini!" shrieked One-Eye.

Flancharee looked at the explorer as he might look at a snake that had just lashed out at his ankle. "Chain him up," he said.

That night the rain came like an explosion in a glass factory. It tore the leaves from the trees, the trees from the ground. Light fractured the sky, thunder thrashed the hills like an open hand. The explorer was not without shelter through all of this, though it was less than he could have hoped for. His cage sat in the middle of a square of sorts, exposed on all sides to the violence of the storm. Sometime during the night there was a sudden heart-stopping crack as of a hundred muskets fired in unison,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and a raphia palm, its leaves the size of canoes, slammed down beside the cage, lifting the wooden box three feet in the air and startling the explorer from a despondency that bordered on the catatonic. After all his triumphs, narrow escapes and quickening hopes, falling back into the hands of the Moors had been too much for him. He'd gone into shock.

He sat up and looked round him. What he saw was no cause for joy: wooden bars, insects, a crazed sky, and a dark silent bank of huts. The cage in which he found himself had been built of hardwood and bamboo to accommodate a rogue lion that had burst through the roof of a hut, killed and devoured the occupants, and then apparently found himself too bloated to abscond. The villagers found him sleeping atop a pile of half-eaten corpses the following morning. While a pair of daredevils stood at the door with their spears, others hastily constructed the cage, which was then forced against the opening. On awakening, the lion had breakfasted briefly and then lumbered out the door and into the cage before he realized that something was amiss. For a month or so the maneater had been the drawing card of Sibidooloo, but he had been recently presented to Moosee, King of Gotto, as a peace offering. When One-Eye and Flancharee found that all the irons available were already employed in restraining slaves collected for the trek to Kamalia, they hit upon the cage as a convenient place to shut up the Explorer. And so he had spent the evening there, in a heap of lion dung, thinking the blackest thoughts.

The collapse of the tree came as something of a blessing. It jolted him from his torpor, and he began to probe the enclosure for a means of escape. He crept round on his hands and knees in the dark as dry scuttling things backed away from his fingers and the rain slashed through the bars to awaken the dormant odor of lion piss. Smelling salts couldn't have cleared his head more effectively. He gasped and gagged, his eyes tearing, hands frantically pawing over every nook and joint of his cell. The first time around he found nothing—the native joiners had done their work well. But then, on closer examination, he discovered a rough spot in the upper right hand corner where the planks of the ceiling met at the cornerpiece. The wood was abraded where the lion had persistently gnawed at it during the weeks of his captivity. Mungo's blood pressure rose: here was a chance! But how to take advantage of it? Instinctively he applied his teeth to it, but accomplished nothing more than collecting splinters in his lips. Then he gouged at it with the edge of his compass until his fingernails began to bleed. Still nothing. Finally, he frisked the ground outside the cage until he came up with a sliver of stone that chewed away at the weak spot like a saw.

Three hours later the first of the bars gave way with a snap of protest. He held his breath and glanced around. The rain beat down with a steady mechanical roar. There was no light anywhere. He went back to work, bent over the wooden struts like a huge sedulous rodent. It took him two hours more to carve himself free. The final bar snapped and he slipped out into the deluge, working the hat down over his brow. Nothing stirred in Sibidooloo—not even a dog—as he leaned into the storm and headed up the road for Kamalia.

It took him six days to get there. He travelled by night, holing up in the forest during the day, drinking from puddles, chewing at roots, picking leeches from his skin. He was startled awake on the afternoon of the second day by the clatter of hoofs, and peered out from his cover to observe One-Eye and his companion hurrying up the road. At dawn on the fourth day he came across a tiny cluster of huts beside the road. He hadn't eaten in days: what little strength he had was ebbing. Desperate, he woke the *Dooty* and offered to write charms in exchange for a bite to eat. The *Dooty* said that there was no food in town for the likes of him, a common thief. "All right," the explorer said, squatting outside the door. "I'll sit here until I've starved to death. And I'll curse you and your crops and your descendants and their crops through all eternity and in the name of Mansa King George III of England." Twenty minutes later the *Dooty's* wife appeared in the doorway with a bowl of kouskous.

At Kamalia he traded a half-written letter to Ailie, his fiancée, for a cup of milk and a platter of *boo,* a dish which was made from corn husks and tasted like sand. When he asked his host about the possibility of joining a slave coffle for the coast, the man directed him to Karfa Taura's house on the far side of town. The month was September. Mist rose from the streets and everywhere there was the insidious clank of chains as slavers gathered their wares against the end of the rainy season and the march to the sea. The explorer kept his head down.

Taura's house, a four or five room affair built of clay and stone, dominated a hill in the center of town. There was a well, a shade tree or two and an expanse of muddy red earth pocked with goat tracks. Out back were a number of cane huts and a corral fenced round with thorn. The explorer presented himself at the door, suffering from fatigue, starvation, mental duress, emaciation, jungle rot, blisters, hemorrhoids, various local infections, hepatitis, diarrhea and a febrile body temperature of one hundred and one degrees. His toga had degenerated to a web of knotted strips, his hat looked like a byproduct of cat-skinning, and he was barefooted. Twenty-five years old, he could easily have passed for sixty. "Tell your master," he croaked at the incredulous black face at the door, "that I am a white man desirous of travelling to the Gambia with one of his slave coffles. Tell him . . ." here he lost his train of thought, "tell him . . . I . . . I failed Greek but could kick a football the length of the field."

A moment later he was led through the house to the *baloon*, a large airy room reserved for guests. There he found Karfa Taura sharing a pipe of tobacco with a number of *slatees** who had come to join his coffle. Taura was wearing a tarboosh and a lustrous blue robe. A gray parrot perched on his shoulder, peeling a berry. "So," he said, "you claim to be a white man from the west. I have

*Free Mandingoes, generally Muslim converts, whose stock-in-trade is human flesh.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never seen a white man, though as a boy I once saw two Portugee in Madina." Taura was Mandingo by birth, Muslim by conversion. He was also filthy rich. "It's funny," he continued after a pause, "but you don't look white. I expected something, well—brighter. Like the belly of a frog."

One of the *slatees* spoke up. He was a murderous-looking character with corrosive eyes. "He's no white man."

"Never," spat another. "I've seen white men at Pisania and Goree, and their skin is as white as the pages of this book." He held up a copy of the *Koran*.

The explorer felt woozy. He found it difficult to remain standing. "Give me a football," he shouted, lapsing into English, "and I'll show you who's white."

This outburst seemed to startle his interrogators for a moment, and they stared up at him with renewed interest. "What's that he said?" But then the first *slatee* growled, "Aaaah, he's just a pariah Moor down on his luck, coming round here on false pretenses in the hope of getting a handout."

"Mad is what he is," his cohort said. "Mad as a hyena. Look at his rags—and the hat!"

Karfa Taura held up his palm. "Süleiman," he said to the man with the book, "give the newcomer your book."

Süleiman handed the book to the explorer.

"Can you read the *Koran?* Taura asked.

Mungo tried, straining to remember *Ouzel's Grammar* and how those arcane dots and slashes related to letters and words. After staring at the book a moment he raised his head and mumbled, "No, I can't read it."

"Illiterate!" shouted the first *slatee.*

"Kafir!" muttered another.

Taura whispered something to his servant and the man left the room to return again in a moment with a second book in his hand. As the servant handed it to the explorer, Taura's voice, calm and patient, purred over the prickling silence: "Perhaps you can read this?"

The leather binding was splotched with mold, there were finger prints in the dust on the cover. The explorer opened the book and tried to concentrate on the black printed letters that swam before his eyes like sunspots. He couldn't focus. The *slatees* were shouting out insults. "You cannot?" Taura asked.

Then all at once the letters came into focus and he was reading, reading like a man at the breakfast table with a copy of *The Monthly Review* spread out before him:

"Good Christian People, I bid your prayers for Christ's Holy Catholic Church, the blessed company of all faithful people . . ."

It was *The Book Of Common Prayer.*

"Niyazi," Taura called out to the servant, "sweep out the back hut for the white man."

The next time the explorer became fully cognizant of his surroundings it was November, and the sere harmattan winds had begun to sweep in off the desert. In the interval, he had tossed on his pallet in the back hut, sweating and hallucinating. Karfa Taura had seen him through the worst of it, spoon-feeding him chicken broth and hot milk and garlic, rubbing his body with healing herbs, letting blood. During one of his lucid moments he had promised Taura the value of one prime slave in return, deliverable upon reaching Pisania and the factory of Dr. Laidley. Taura thought it a pretty good deal, as he would have nursed the explorer in any case, fascinated as he was by this strange mythical being whose hair grew blonder and skin whiter by the day.

At Taura's table one evening, as they were sharing a bowl of kouskous and mashed chick peas, the explorer brought up the subject of the slave coffle: when would it depart for the Gambia? Outside, the crickets suddenly left off their cheeping. A host of faces looked first at the explorer, and then at Taura, seated at the head of the mat which served as a table. (There were many more *slatees* present now, most of them dependent upon Taura for their current expenses—he would be reimbursed when the slaves were sold at Madina.) Taura smiled at the explorer as he might have smiled at a six-year-old who'd asked why the stars didn't fall from the sky. "Well, my friend," he began, "I'll tell you. There are six swollen rivers to cross between here and Dindikoo on the far side of the Jallonka Wilderness. In between there are seas of grass, taller than a man's head. If we wait a month or so—till late December or early January—the rivers will have subsided and the villagers will have burned away much of the grass. I know you are anxious to get back to *Tobaubo doo,* but to travel now would be impossible."

On December nineteenth Taura collected all his local debts and set out up the Niger to the town of Kancaba, in order to purchase slaves for the trip to the Gambia. He returned a month later with a new wife (his fourth) and thirteen reasonably marketable slaves, all of whom had the requisite number of limbs and eyes. The explorer was overjoyed when his benefactor stepped through the door. He'd been counting the days, impatient, his every waking moment devoted to thoughts of Ailie and the African Association. He pictured himself dressed to the nines in a sparkling muslin cravat and a new sergdusoy jacket, lecturing Sir Joseph Banks and Durfeys and the rest, a legend in his own time. The suffering and privation were over. In two months he'd be the toast of London. Karfa Taura wrapped an arm around his shoulder. "The rivers are down," he said, "the grass burned off, the *slatees* have gathered their wares. We depart on the first of February."

But the first of February came and went. Süleiman had gone off to Sibidooloo to collect some trifling debt; Hamid and Madi Konko didn't have their dry provisions ready; the moon was in the wrong corner of the sky. Excuses. The month wore away with them. And now, with March coming on, the *slatees* argued that they should postpone travelling until Rhamadan was over. March became April, the fast moon prevailed. Then one night in the middle of the month all of Kamalia turned out at the open-air mosque to watch for the new moon, the appearance of which would signal the end of the Rhamadan fast and offer an auspicious omen for travellers. The explorer stood amidst the throng of chanting Mandingoes and looked up with disgust at the clouded night sky. Hours passed. A number of villagers gave up and returned to their huts, determined to fast another day. But then, at

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

midnight, the clouds began to pull back in shreds and the new moon poked its horns through to a chorus of hoots, cheers and pistol shots: Rhamadan was ended.

Like everyone else, Karfa Taura was caught up in the excitement. He threw dignity to the wind, jogging up and down like a cheerleader. Fires lit the sky, pandemonium crested like a wave. Karfa took the explorer by the arm and shouted in his ear: "We leave at dawn tomorrow!"

Light was working its way across the night sky in a series of barely perceptible leaps when the coffle began to gather outside Karfa Taura's house. Seventy-three people and six asses shuffled their feet in the dust, waiting for the sun to break over the hills. Thirty-five of these were slaves, bound for sale on the coast. The rest were itinerant merchants, *slatees*, their wives and domestic servants. Rounding out the group were Mungo and six *jilli keas*, or singing men, whose vocalizing came in handy as a diversion from the hardships of the road and in smoothing the coffle's reception at villages along the way. As the first pale rays illuminated the treetops there was a flurry of cinching and uncinching, coughing into fists, rechecking of final details and idle ear-pulling. Then they were off, leaving Kamalia in an orderly line of march, preceded by Karfa Taura, Süleiman and the singing men. When they reached the summit of a hill two miles from town, all the travellers were ordered to sit down, half the group facing westward, half looking back on Kamalia. Süleiman then delivered a solemn, nasal and interminable prayer, after which two of the other *slatees* circled the coffle three times, making impressions in the earth with the butts of their spears and muttering something unintelligible by the way of a talisman.

When they got under way again, the explorer noticed that some of the slaves were having trouble walking. They staggered under their loads, bow-legged and uncertain, tottering from foot to foot like worn-out drunks. Karfa Taura shook his head. It was a pity, he said, but some of them had been in shackles for years, and the unwanted exertion of taking a full stride wrought havoc on disused muscles, tendons and joints. It was a pity, he repeated, but an accident of the trade. Slaves had a tendency to run off, and so the accepted manner of confining them was to bind the ankles of two of them together, making it impossible for either to move independently. In order to merely scrape about like the losing entry in a three-legged race, one of the slaves had to raise the heavy shackles above the ankles by means of an attached chain. Then, with mincing deliberate steps, the pair would rattle forward. While travelling to market the leg shackles were removed, and the slaves were bound together in fours by a rope looped round their necks. A man armed with a spear marched between each group of four, to discourage any thoughts of wandering. When the coffle settled down for the night the leg irons were refastened, along with a heavy-link chain that replaced the rope round each slave's neck.

"But these are human beings," the explorer said.

Karfa Taura adjusted his tarboosh. "True," he said. His tone was matter-of-fact, as if he were discussing nuts and bolts or a herd of sheep. "But they are also trade goods."

Despite the limping and groaning of the slaves (which was lessened from time to time by the application of the lash), the coffle made the walled village of Marraboo by mid-afternoon, rested briefly, then marched on to Bala, where they spent the night. The following day's trek brought them to Worumbang, on the border of Manding and Jallonkadoo. It was the last outpost of civilization for a hundred miles—beyond Worumbang lay the Jallonka Wilderness.

The Jallonka Wilderness was an atavism—ten thousand square miles of uninhabited jungles, hills and grasslands, as pristine and primitive as the world before man. Within its reaches were six rivers that had to be forded, three of them upper tributaries of the Sengal. There was no food to be had along the way, nor any shelter. Predators roamed the brakes and forests as they had for millions of years, and bandits lay in wait along the borders. It was a dangerous and inhospitable place—a place of shadow and legend, of bad luck and sudden death—and Karfa Taura, his fingers crossed, was anxious to get through it as expeditiously as possible.

Accordingly, the coffle left Worumbang at dawn and marched until nightfall without a break. The slaves carried bundles of trade goods on their heads, the sun was like a whip, the whip like a bad dream. One of them, a middle-aged woman whose facial cicatrices indicated that she had once aspired to a higher station in life, constantly fell out of line. At one point she lay down and refused to go any farther until Süleiman applied the lash to the soles of her feet and she staggered up and continued on in a sort of trance. Cruel and usual punishment. The explorer was appalled—but knew he was powerless to do anything about it. He was excess baggage himself, and besides, given his debilitated condition it was all he could do to keep up with even the weakest of the slaves.

When the coffle stopped at a stream called Comeissang for the night, Mungo shuffled over to where the slaves had been confined and looked for her among the sullen black faces. He found her at the end of the queue, stretched out on her back. Her eyes were wide, staring up at nothing, and she was breathing as if she'd just broken the tape in a footrace. The explorer bent over her and offered her a drink of water. She said nothing. Just lay there, staring at the sky, breathing hard. He asked her name, his voice hushed and sympathetic. Somehow he felt a need to comfort her, tell her it would all work out, though he knew it wouldn't.

"Her name is Nealee," whispered the slave beside her. A crude iron band pinched his ankle to hers. "She's got a sickness, her blood won't warm her feet."

Nealee. The explorer looked down at her. Where had he heard that name before?

"You going to eat her?" the voice rasped.

"Eat her? What do you mean?"

The man's lips were cracked. There was a rope burn across his adam's apple. "*Maddummulo*," he said. "The black man puts his slave to work, the white man eats him."

Mungo was astonished at the misconception, offended by the accusation. "Nonsense."

"No one ever comes back."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well that's because they put you in a boat to take you to another land, a land like this one, where you work in the fields and—"

"*Tobaubo fonnio,*" the slave said, "a white man's lie." His voice was flat and emotionless. "There is no other land. They take you to where the water goes on forever and hack you to pieces. The fires flare through the night, the kettles boil. They pick at your bones."

Nealee wouldn't eat the following morning. It was cold, gray, half an hour before sunrise. Quick piliginous things flashed through the undergrowth, birds nattered, a breath of stagnation soured the air. Karfa Taura intoned a general benediction, after which everyone in the party was given a cup of watery gruel. Nealee sat up painfully, took the cup from Süleiman's domestic, and flung it in his face. When Madi Konko laid into her with his switch, she rolled over and began vomiting. Someone cursed. She'd been eating clay. "Eating clay?" the explorer said.

"She wants to die," said the man shackled to her.

After morning prayers the coffle reassembled. Nealee refused to stand and Süleiman was forced to uncoil his braided whip. She lay there, face down in the dust, and bore the first two or three strokes patiently, then rose shakily and started off. It was immediately apparent that something was wrong; she lurched forward and reeled back again, as if she were being tugged apart by some invisible force. Süleiman ordered one of his men to cut her from the tether and take up her load. The *slatee* then marched behind her himself, prodding her from time to time with the butt of his spear.

Just before noon there was a minor disaster. One of the singing men blundered into a hive of fierce, irascible West African bees—killer bees, as the locals called them. Through the millenia these insects had developed a swift, effective and inexorable means of dealing with the honeybadgers and sweet-toothed hominids that assaulted their nests: at the slightest provocation they swarmed out en masse and stung the offender to death. Each bee was programmed to fly into a suicidal stinging frenzy at the release of an alarm chemical, which also served to direct the bee to its target. If a man was stung within a hundred yards of the nest, he could expect to be inundated by a foaming mass of insects in less than a minute. Needless to say, the encounter more often than not proved fatal.

In the case of Geo, the singing man, it wasn't as bad as it might have been. The first sting prompted him to drop his flute and plunge headlong into a bog beside the path, where he burrowed into the muck like an amphibian. Two or three of his quick-witted companions followed suit, while the rest—free men, slaves and *slatees* alike—took to their heels. The bees, confused over the loss of the primary target, divided their forces in pursuit of the seventy-two secondary targets. Strategically, it was a mistake. As it turned out, no one in the party took more than fifteen or twenty stings, and some—the explorer included—escaped unscathed. But when the coffle was regrouped it was discovered that Nealee was missing. Immediately the *slatees* broke out the irons and shackled the slaves together, while armed guards ran off to track her down. After setting fire to the brush in order to drive off the bees, they found her beside a shallow stream, swollen with scores of beestings. She had apparently attempted to elude the insects by splashing water over herself. It hadn't worked.

This time the whip was ineffective: she could not get up. Karfa Taura shook his head. "Strap her to the ass," Süleiman shouted. The panniers were removed from one of the asses and Nealee was laid across the animal's back, her hands and feet lashed together underneath. From the first the animal was intractable. It bucked and kicked until finally the straps gave way and Nealee was tossed into the bushes where she lay like a rag doll.

Over two hours had been lost. The members of the party, spooked by the wildness of the place and the hair-raising legends surrounding it, were anxious to move on. A cry went up and down the length of the coffle: "*kang-tegi, kang-tegi.*" Cut her throat, cut her throat. The sun scraped across the sky. A man stepped forward with a knife. Süleiman nodded at him, then ordered the coffle forward. Half an hour later the man rejoined the party, Nealee's dress tied round his waist.

The remainder of the journey was uneventful. The coffle proceeded in a series of forced marches, from dawn till dusk. Twenty miles a day, over mounds of splintered rock and hills haunted with shadow, through copses cluttered with fallen trees and strangling lianas, bogs that sucked the shoes from your feet, silt-clogged rivers darkened by clouds of insects and churning with fish and reptiles. It was all Mungo could do to keep up, weakened as he was by his bout with fever and starvation. He threw away his spear, his water gourd, the bone knife Aisha had given him. The straps of his sandals bit into his feet like wire and the sun crashed down on his head until all he could hear was the frenzied pshh-pshh-pshh of cymbals slashing away at the dénouement of some opera or other. But he made it. First to Dindikoo, where he broke the bad news to Johnson's three wives and eleven children, and then to Pisania, where he drifted up the front steps of Dr. Laidley's log piazza like a ghost.

Dr. Laidley was fat and florid. He wore a dress shirt in one-hundred-ten degree heat and ninety-nine percent humidity. With his tonsure and wire-rimmed spectacles he looked like a caricature of Ben Franklin. "Park?" he shouted, thundering across the floorboards, his pudgy hand outstretched in wonder and greeting. "Mungo Park?"

Mungo was in luck. He arrived in Pisania on June 12, 1797, with one thought in mind: booking passage to England on any boat that would have him. But the monsoon season was coming on with its rot and pestilence, and he was afraid he'd have to wait it out before another boat landed on the Gambia. It could be months. He drew a bill on the African Association through Dr. Laidley, paid Karfa Taura handsomely, and settled in for a long, anti-climactic wait. But on the third day of his vigil, by purest coincidence, an American slaver sailed up the river to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exchange a cargo of rum and tobacco for men, women and children. The *Charlestown* was bound for South Carolina, departing on the seventeenth. Without hesitation, the explorer signed on: better to take a circuitous route home than wait out the rains in a leaky back room in Pisania. After two years on the dark continent, he was aching for some light.

On the morning of the seventeenth the explorer shaved, slipped into the clothes Dr. Laidley had provided him, and climbed aboard the *Charlestown*. The deck creaked under his feet as he set his valise down and tried to ascertain where his cabin might be located. He could see nothing. Fog hovered over the water like the underside of a dream, catching at the rigging, dissolving the quarterdeck. Vague forms glided ghost-like through the haze, mosquitoes whined. It was hot as an iron foundry. Puzzled, the explorer stood rooted to the deck and watched two figures gesticulating like Punch and Judy through a curtain of mist.

"We got to wait till the soup clears off, Cap'n," said the shorter of the two.

"Draw the anchor, Mr. Frip. We sail immediately."

"But—" (there was the sound of mosquito-slapping and a guttural, heartfelt curse).

"But me no buts, Mister. Stay here in this fetid shithole another ten minutes and half the crew'll be down with the shivers and the black vomit. Haul that anchor, I say!"

The smaller figure drew off into the gloom, mumbling and swatting: "Can't even find the fuckin' thing in this shit . . . ouch! sonofabitchin' moskeeters . . ."

It took two weeks to get down the river to Fort Goree, held up as they were by heavy fog, snags and contradictory winds. Four seamen, the ship's surgeon and three slaves died of fever along the way. At Goree the Captain informed Mungo that the ship would be unavoidably detained because he was unable to obtain provisions for the crossing. "Detained?" said Mungo, his heart sinking. For two months now—lying at Kamalia, struggling through the Jallonka Wilderness—he had been sustained by visions of the eager, attentive faces ranged round the conference table in Soho Square, of Ailie in her underwear, of his book and burgeoning celebrity. He'd survived disease, humiliation, exhaustion and despair, and now he was ready to reap his reward. "For how long?" he asked.

The Captain pulled on his dogskin gloves and offered the explorer a Raleigh cigar. "There's a relief boat due in at Goree in mid-September," he said. "We can stock up then and be on our way."

Mid-September! He couldn't believe it. Three months more in this pest-ridden hole, three months more bobbing in a rotten berth off of a prison garrison maintained by the dregs of London. He may as well have stayed at Pisania, with Dr. Laidley. There at least he could have had a glass of wine, some intelligent conversation, a room to himself. Here he had convicts for companions, a hold full of moribund black faces, cockroaches longer than a man's finger, and the incessant creeping rot that made Goree one of the world's most pestilent spots. So near and yet so far. He gave way to depression, lay in his berth and watched the ship rot around him.

The *Charlestown* finally set sail on October first, the explorer having been pressed into assuming the role of the late surgeon. He hadn't made much use of his medical knowledge in the interior, but summoned up all Dr. Anderson had taught him in order to deal with the frightening conditions aboard ship. The American slavers, because their crews were smaller, were far less humane than the British. For fear of mutiny the slaves were kept in irons throughout the voyage. They lived in the dark, damp and cold, wallowing in their own waste, breathing consumption, typhus, hepatitis, racked with malarial fevers. The irons wore the flesh from wrists and ankles; maggots hatched in the wounds. Mungo did his best. He let blood, applied leeches, forced vinegar down their throats. Eight died at Goree, eleven more at sea. The stiffened corpses were dragged from their irons and tossed into the spume, where quick pelagic sharks fought over the remains.

The crew didn't fare much better. Three died at Goree, another two at sea. But as it turned out, this was the least of the Captain's worries. A far more pressing problem were the leaks that had developed in the hull while the ship sat at anchor off Goree. Now, on the high seas, the leaks had become critical. So critical in fact that the most able-bodied slaves were released from their irons in order to man the pumps. Fourteen-hour shifts, the whip cracking over their heads. They pumped, fainted from exhaustion, were lashed to consciousness, and pumped again. Still, the boat was taking on so much water it became clear that it would never make South Carolina. It became clear to some, that is.

"Cap'n—you've got to make for the West Indies or before you know it we'll be treading water in the company of them sharks out there."

"You're an educated man, Mr. Frip. Take a look over the gunwale and read me what's writ along the bow: I think you'll find that it says *The Charlestown*, does it not? Well, Sir, that's where I've been paid to take her and that's where she'll go."

"Begging your pardon, Cap'n Sir, but me and the crew has been talking amongst ourselves, Sir, and we've unanimously decided to break out our seamen's dirks and ventilate your domineering hide till you look like one of them fountains in downtown Richmond, Sir, if you don't change course for Antigua within thirty seconds by my pocketwatch, with all due respect, Sir."

From Antigua, the explorer was able to catch the Chesterfield Packet, which had stopped at St. John's for the mail on the return voyage from the Leeward Islands. The ship sailed on the twenty-fourth of November, and drew within sight of Falmouth on the morning of December twenty-second, 1797. Shorebirds wheeled in the sky, the wind flung spray over the decks. There was ice on the rail, and a thin watery snow added sting to the gusts. The crew was invisible, the Captain in bed, the cook's terrier huddled beneath the stove. But Mungo Park, after two years and seven months in exile, stood beside the helmsman with a grin on his face as the distant rocky isle rode up over the waves. □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CATHY EARNEST

MY PROTAGONIST IN VIENNA

I'm driving home and on the seat next to me, wrapped in green paper, are more books. Last night I read twenty pages out of Tuchman about the plague and was fascinated, so today, in the bookstore, I picked up *The Varieties of History* by Stern because of its different viewpoints, *What Happened in History* by Childe because I know nothing about the cultural and moral values from the Old World to the fall of the Roman Empire, and Snow's *Science and Government* because I've heard of Snow, I've not heard of the feud between Tizard and Lindemann, and because it was marked down to fifty cents. I should go home and begin immediately. But I must write a story for class tomorrow and I put my mind to that on the way home. I have an idea about a girl who goes to Vienna to study music, but really she wants an adventure. I don't know where to begin it. I think perhaps in a Vienna bookstore.

A policeman pulls me over and I cannot understand why. He is polite and tells me.

"Clocked you going 71.2 back at the junction."

I am struck by such precision. I tell him honestly, But I wasn't in a hurry, just riding along, thinking out this story about a girl in Vienna. Couldn't he give me another chance?

"Lady, everyone always wants another chance. I risk my life chasing all you drivers down the road and then you all want another chance."

I know the policeman hasn't risked his life. I get a ticket and advice on what lies to tell the judge if I go to court, but I still have no idea where to take my protagonist after the bookstore.

When I get home Mother comes over and is annoyed by the disarray in my apartment. She says I never read these books anyway and if I got rid of half of them I would have room to sit on my couch, or eat on my kitchen table. This is not a place to live, Mother says, it is a library.

Mother sees the green paper wrapper, picks it up and says, "More?" I take the sealed package out of her hands and set it on top of the pile on the couch. This pile is the most current collection of things to read. Mother walks around the neatly folded, undisturbed newspapers on the floor and says I waste my money getting these delivered. I say that I read one a week and so it is worth it. I must know a little of what is going on in the world. "You can put on the TV and watch the news."

"But then I end up watching a movie."

"It'd do you good to do something besides read."

I notice this conversation has gone in a circle and I recognize that I recognize it. I want her to go home so I can write my story.

"What's it about?"

"I don't know yet."

"Why don't you try writing something funny? You know, you do have a funny side, even if you refuse to see it. You sit around reading all these books . . . "

I turn away and go into the kitchen and instead of covering my ears with my hands I drown her out by shouting, "Do you want coffee?" which is exactly what I don't want to say.

She says yes, but I say, "No, let's not. I've got to start on this story and you have to . . . " but I can't think of anything that she has to do.

"I'll be glad when you're out of school. All these *things* you have to do! No time to live." Mother leaves. I do not wave at her from my window. I go immediately to the bathroom to get preliminaries out of the way and the small confined space without windows helps direct my thinking to my protagonist in the bookstore.

The phone rings and I pull my pants up from my ankles and hold them as I waddle to the phone. It is

CATHY EARNEST is a writing graduate of the Chicago Circle campus of the University of Illinois, where she teaches and works at a novel.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Grandmother. Yesterday, thinking I should see her more often, I said we should go out for supper together today. Now she says we are having supper at her house and she needs to know when I will be there. I offer, "around six," but she says she must know exactly because otherwise dinner will be ruined. I say six-thirty and she is happy.

"Were you sleeping?" she asks.

"No, I was in the bathroom and I'm working on a story."

"Have you heard from your mother?" she asks.

"She was here."

"Oh," she says, "I tried to call her and wondered where she was."

"I need to get back to the bathroom," I say, and she hangs up.

I have a direction for my protagonist: she leaves the bookstore and goes to St. Stephans where she will tour the catacombs and view the bones from the plague.

I take Plato and Rousseau off my typewriter and find paper. I can't think of an appropriate name for my protagonist, reject the first person and begin with "She." But this character needs to have a name and I think through several, look up their meanings in my *3500 Names for Baby* and wish I'd bought the more expensive *7000 Names and Their Origins*, give up again and use a line for the time being: "——— paid for her books, despaired for only a moment about not being able to afford them, put them in her black case and walked down Kärntnerstrasse towards the Stephansdom." I despair at having given away all I have of my story so soon.

The phone rings. It is Grandmother. She is sorry for disturbing me again, but she has to know if I want cauliflower or broccoli. Because she had to get off the phone so quick before, she forgot to ask me. I tell her either one is fine but she says, "Come on, tell me. Which?" I say cauliflower, but remember that green vegetables are better for you, "No, broccoli." She says okay and that she'll let me get back to work. "I'll be so happy," she says, "when you are out of school and have a regular life."

My protagonist enters St. Stephans as an organ recital is about to begin. She never cared much for organ music but since she is there she sits down to listen. While she waits she looks in her case at the books she has just bought. She feels good knowing she owns them, but is ashamed. The man in the bookstore had said, "Do you know there are people who buy books and never read them?" The recital begins and she is stricken by the beauty and power of the instrument. The sounds are clear and rich. She sits lost in the mood of Bach and Buxtehude and when it is over reads the program: the organ is 300 years old and has 10,000 pipes.

She goes on a tour of the catacombs. She is lectured to, shown rooms, then looks through a small barred window into a doorless cell half full of bones. My protagonist looks to see what parts the bones are from, but they are decomposing and sticking every which way and she cannot tell an arm bone from a legbone. The tour guide says, "The room used to be full to the top." The lady behind gets mad at her for taking so long at the window and pushes her away.

It is already six o'clock and I tell myself I am at a lull in my work and it is all right to go to Grandmother's to eat. I am not hungry, though. I've been eating cheese and crackers and cookies since one. I feel fat and full and wish I could stand smoking so I could take that up instead. I stay seated and reread what I've got. At ten after I jump up and comb my hair. I try to sort out the story. What is it about? Not knowing where my story is going is an adventure, but I'd feel better if I knew where the end was. The phone rings. Grandmother.

"You haven't left yet?"

"Is that why you called?"

"Yes. Dinner is nearly ready."

"It only takes five minutes to get to your house." It is quarter after.

"It'll be ruined."

"I'm *trying* to leave."

I tell myself I cannot be mean. I mustn't be mean. She is cooking this dinner for me; it was my idea to have dinner; it is not her fault that I do not know where my story is going. I manage to say nicely, "I'll see you in a little while," and we hang up. I put on my coat and leave.

I let myself in her building with my key and am careful not to slam the door. I check her mailbox before she can shout down, "Check my mailbox," and go quietly up the stairs, changing the expression on my face from thoughtful to friendly.

"Did you check my mail?"

"Nothing there," I say.

"Put your coat on the bed," she says. Then "Sit down."

Grandmother puts the food on our plates. I offer to help.

"There's nothing you can do. It's all done." And she gets napkins and puts water on for coffee and spoons out gravy onto our meat.

She wants to know what is new and I tell her about my speeding ticket. She says she will give me fifteen dollars toward it. I can't imagine why and she says, can't she do it if she wants to? Do I want cash or check?

She tells me her friend Ann called, the one she used to jump out of buildings with, holding umbrellas. Has she ever told me about that? She tells me again, anyway, that she took umbrellas the people forgot in her father's tavern, held one in each hand, and jumped from the second story balcony. The umbrellas would turn inside out and so she'd put them in someone's garbage can down the street so no one would suspect her. "Oh, I was a daredevil when I was a kid. It's a wonder I didn't break my neck."

I like these stories and listen for details, my protagonist finally taking a seat of secondary importance in my mind. I look at this woman sitting before me and I want to remember the stories this time.

"This plate," Grandmother points her fork at her own dish of food, "is from Mrs. Bauman. I didn't stay with her long but she insisted I take this plate. I guess she really liked me, she cried when I told her I was moving, but she was crabby and stingy. For lunch she always made me sausage on Vienna bread, no butter."

I want to get this right so I break in, "Was this the first lady you lived with after your parents died?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She thinks. She was maybe thirteen, fourteen, fifteen . . . no she was fifteen, and it was the second house she lived in. She continues.

"I couldn't eat the sandwich. I'd choke on it. I always hated sausage. So every day at work I'd try to eat it because I was hungry, and I always threw up," Grandmother brings her hand up from her stomach to show what happens. "Some of the girls who worked there were real nice and they'd bring me sandwiches, though they'd always make out it was an accident so I wouldn't feel bad. 'Oh, look,' someone would say, 'my mother packed me two sandwiches.' Or, 'I must've gotten my father's lunch today. Two sandwiches, Josie, want one of these?' "

I take more noodles. I eat my broccoli.

"Good?"

"Very good."

"Have more meat." She gets more gravy from the pot. "That was the same house where the girl died of influenza. Most beautiful girl I ever saw. Blond hair, naturally curly. I saw her the night before she died. Healthy, not a thing the matter with her. We were all like one family there, everyone down, up, all over. This girl and her family lived on the third floor, they had the whole flat. Mrs. Johnson came down in the morning and she was sobbing and wouldn't stop. We asked her what was the matter." Grandmother wrinkles up her face and whines out—" 'I just buried my daughter Liza this morning.' Well, we all thought she was a little loco, you know?" and she puts her finger to her head and bends it back and forth instead of moving it in a circle. "But she was gone. Eighteen years old. Got sick during the night and choked to death. That was how the epidemic worked, you choked to death. There were so many people dying that in the morning there were rows of hearses going down the road. They didn't even let you see the dead, they took them right away and buried them to keep the thing from spreading more." Grandmother collects plates. "After that we were all really scared, someone dying from it right in our house. But no one else got sick. Her two boys never got it either."

I eat Jell-o for dessert but then I have to go. I feel guilty for leaving so soon. I explain, "I have to write a story."

"Tonight?"

I nod.

"Oh, my God," she says. "When are you through with school?"

Being through with school is painful to me. I say quietly, "June."

"Well, that's not too far now." She smiles and straightens her body up soldier-like and I know what is coming next, "Then you'll get a job and make lots of money and will split with me, right?"

I nod only slightly.

"You're not going to *more* school, are you?"

I shrug and tilt my head.

"You don't want to get too much school. You know, men don't like women who are too smart."

"Thank you for dinner."

"Glad you could come. It's nicer to eat when someone is here. Sometimes I'm not even hungry. Last night I couldn't think what, so I ate cereal. But I had a big lunch, so that was all right."

I lean down and kiss her.

"Go home and write good so you pass."

I am going to leave but Grandmother says, "Oh, don't forget the food," and hurries to the kitchen for the bag with the containers of broccoli and noodles and meat with gravy. "Eat that now," she says. "Don't let it spoil."

I also take her garbage. "Don't get the two bags mixed up." And I still remember the joke from her moving in here—"Don't forget to bring some garbage up with you," she had told me. It is old now and I don't make reference to it.

Ready to greet me when I open the door to go outside is my protagonist. As I drive home I remember I left her in the catacombs. Once again at the typewriter I walk her down the street towards her house. She sees three people from school going into a keller. She yells, "Hi!" They call back but do not invite her to go with them. She's disappointed. She doesn't want to go home where her roommate Giselle will probably be with friends. They will be drinking wine and won't offer her any. She's lonely. When she arrives home she knocks at her Hausfrau's door and they talk. She likes to listen to her stories about the war, what it's like to have bombs go off nearby, to hear the sirens, to gather up your children and take them down into the cellar. She tells her about the prisons in the parks, the buildings down all around, the rationing of milk and bread and meat, how she got extra because she was a diplomat's wife, and how she shared it because she didn't need so much.

My protagonist goes to Heiligenstadt and visits one of Beethoven's houses. It is a small two room flat upstairs. From it Beethoven could see the church steeple. The guide tells her this is the window he sat at, in front of this piano, and looked out at the church. When he saw the steeple shaking with vibration he mourned for himself, the most pitiable of men. He, a composer, could not hear the loud clanging of the bell when the tradesmen, politicians, doctors could hear the tinkling of a pin. While she is standing at Beethoven's window the bell strikes and she sees the vibration of the steeple that he saw. She studies the motion. When she leaves she buys a copy of the Heiligenstadt Testament from the guide. Back in Vienna she cannot feel the terror of a bomb about to fall. She cannot feel the fear of the plague.

I read my story and am embarrassed at places. I scratch out, rewrite. I try to get rid of the redundancies, the tone of complaint, but I don't always know how. I wonder if I can end my story by killing off Giselle for her rudeness and popularity. But the plot does not call for this; and such people are not easily killed off. Besides, Giselle has her good points: she plays the Brahms g minor Rhapsody as well as my protagonist does, to my protagonist's dismay, and mine too. And she has gone to Heiligenstadt and seen the bell and thought about how Beethoven might have felt. In the end my protagonist doesn't read *The Varieties of History*, *What Happened in History*, or *Science and Government*, though she means to someday. She continues to buy books, and she keeps her piles in order from "want to" to "should" to "must." □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE RECOVERY OF VISION

BY SCOTT SANDERS

While Sierra bought tickets for the bus to Edinburgh, Hazard calculated the number of dulcimers he would have to make and sell in order to pay her back. And he would have to make them blind, too, unless these drops cured the infection in his eyes. His money had run out nine days into their fifteen-day hurricane tour of England. Now he travelled on her charity, as he had slept and eaten on it for most of the two years they had been living together in Memphis. When she told him the ticket price, her wry smile in place as usual, he wrote the figure on the card in his wallet where he kept a running total of his debt to her.

Astronomical debt, enough to make a Rockefeller weep. When they flew home to Memphis after New Year's, he would have to give up building dulcimers and fiddles and fretless banjos, would have to weasel back into his forklift job at Firestone. Ach, the suffocating smell of rubber.

Let's break out of this two-year rut of loving indecision, she had told him. Let's fly to England for Christmas, decide about marriage. England? he had stammered. Marriage? Like playing marbles for keeps, she had chided him, where the rules say you have to live with the consequences of your hits and misses.

Eleven ragged days into the trip, his eyes attacked by some germ picked up off a handrail or doorknob, wallet empty except for the record of debts, Hazard was snarled worse than ever in loving indecision. After hustling through London, Canterbury, Oxford, and a dozen intervening curiosities; after dawn at Stonehenge; after evensong at Ely Cathedral; after darts and hard cider and a Baedecker's worth of pubs, he was convinced he would never overcome his fatigue or his debt or his fear of joining himself to this woman. Whenever he imagined marriage he saw his grandmother and grandfather on their fiftieth wedding anniversary, their hands joined to form an arch through which the twenty-seven grandchildren paraded. If either one had let go, both old people would have fallen.

At dusk on the eleventh day a red double-decker bus trundled them from Cambridge to Lesser Buzzard, where they would catch the Edinburgh express. Hazard sagged to the pavement beneath the one streetlight in the village, his back propped against the locked door of the only shop. Posters in the window advertised chocolate and tobacco and lottery tickets.

"Let's explore the great metropolis of Lesser Buzzard," Sierra suggested. "We have till nearly midnight."

"I can see it all from here." And he could, too: the twin rows of cottages and the parish church, all of somber granite, flanking the London-Edinburgh highway like oversized gravestones.

"Here then, Mister Stick-in-the-mud, have another burden," Sierra told him, plumping her rucksack down in his lap. With arms outstretched like a tightrope walker's, she balanced on the curb and tiptoed out of sight beyond the circle of streetlight.

Late as it was, organ music groaned from the church. Judging from the false starts and repeated phrases, this was a rehearsal, not a performance. Did the village hobble off to sleep on these tortured melodies? Still, it couldn't touch the awfulness of a poorly-scraped fiddle. With eyes shut Hazard listened to the organ and the whine of truck tires. Lorries, the British called them. Odd prissy lan-

---

SCOTT SANDERS' novel, Terrarium, *about a 21st century survival community in Oregon, will appear later this year. He teaches at Indiana University.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guage. His eyes felt as if there were cinders beneath the lids. The pavement chilled him through his corduroy trousers and his insulated longjohns. Meanwhile Sierra was out there circling in the darkness, spinning about her own axis.

He was on the point of going to hunt for her when she came catfooting back along the curb, her face in its parka hood catching the sheen of streetlight. She held a knobby hardroll in each gloved hand.

"Here's supper," she said.

"Where on earth did you find them?"

"Followed my nose to a kitchen door, knocked very politely, and bought them from a woman who had flour in her hair."

"A wonder she didn't shoot you."

"We're not in Tennessee, my dear vigilante," she reminded him.

"Tennessee hasn't been this cold since the last ice age."

"Well quit squatting there like some idiotic penguin," she said, "and let's go eat our rolls in the church."

"Out here is fine," he objected.

"Tough guy. Bites nails in two, sleeps in snowdrifts." She clamped one of the rolls in her teeth and pulled at his sleeve. "Come on."

"But there's somebody murdering the organ."

"So we'll dine to music. Up, hero."

Inside the huge ironclad doors of the church, the music sounded less tortured, more like the booming splash of waters on a rocky coast. Glimpsing the organist, who had a neck thick as a stevedore's and hands like baseball gloves, Hazard balked. "He won't care, silly," Sierra whispered, guiding him into a pew. "Some musicians actually like to have people listen." The only light in the place glowed above the organ. There was no heat, of course, but the walls offered shelter from the north wind.

While they munched their hardrolls they soaked in the rumbling tones of the organ. Each note lit fires on the inside of Hazard's eyelids. After a thunderstorm ending to one piece, the cover slammed down over the keyboard and the organist came shuffling down the aisle with a fistful of sheet music. Spying Hazard and Sierra, he called out amiably, "Rather sorry concert, I'm afraid."

"Practice makes perfect," Sierra answered.

He shrugged. Hazard imagined him shouldering halves of beef onto ships. Three layers of sweater showed at his neck. "Keeping warm?" the organist inquired.

"Trying to," Sierra replied. "We're waiting for the eleven-fifty bus."

"Off to Edinburgh, is it? Then you must come have some tea with an old displaced Scot. It's only just next door."

They sipped jasmine tea. The organist unfolded a map of Edinburgh across his knees, and showed them with a blacknailed thumb where to visit. Sierra drew him into talk as if he were an uncle.

"Who knitted the afghan?" she asked, patting the couch-cover.

"My wife, before the Lord took her away. It's on account of her I'm learning the organ."

"Did she play?"

"Fit for heaven, she did." The man sighed like air-brakes on a train. "Noble woman."

Hazard forgot the ache in his eyes, watching Sierra work her charm. Without her gumption to spur him on, he knew he would still be out there shivering on the sidewalk. In fact, he would still be hauling warm tires around the Firestone warehouse in Memphis. Quit that stupid job, she had urged him, move in with me, make your instruments on the kitchen table. After weeks of shilly-shallying, he had agreed, on the condition that he would pay his share of rent and food when musicians started journeying from the four corners of America to buy his instruments. A gift, she had said then with her indulgent smile. A loan, he had always insisted, remembering his father's advice that a man pays his own way and stands on his own feet. And so his tools and lumber filled one of her two bedrooms. When they made love, she would pick woodshavings from his beard. For two years the stack of cards, with its inked trail of indebtedness, grew thicker. He sold every instrument he built—the fiddles with their tiger-maple bellies, the dulcimers with their rosewood ribs—but he could not charge enough to make a living. "We make a living between us," Sierra would say. "We both work. The hospital just happens to overpay me for managing their business, and all these skinflints underpay you for your instruments." Lean on me, she seemed to be saying. That would enrage Hazard, and he would end up sleeping on his pile of air-cured lumber, humiliated by his need for her.

"Not to hurry you," the organist was saying, "but it's half past, and the bus drivers sometimes use a lead foot coming up from London." He sat there in his overstuffed armchair with a hand splayed over each knee, like a catcher in the dugout wearing two mitts.

Sierra patted one of those hands. "Keep at your music. We'll think of you when we're in Edinburgh."

"Do that. Be sure not to forget the sunset at the castle. One of God's wonders. And the Walter Scott monument."

"We'll remember."

Hazard also mumbled thanks, envying the man for the firm way he sat in his chair.

Beneath the streetlight again, rucksacks slung over shoulders, they huddled against a wind that seemed to arrive directly from Siberia. Trucks and cars whooshed by at intervals of one or two minutes. If darkened windows were a clue, Lesser Buzzard was asleep.

"What we do to save the price of a bed-and-breakfast," Sierra muttered.

Hazard bristled at that, because it had been his idea to take the overnight bus to Edinburgh.

"Ah well, youth." She stamped her feet. "So how are the peepers?"

"They're coming along fine," Hazard lied.

"You didn't act like they were coming along any too well back there at our friend the organist's. All squinted up. Stoop down here, let me see. Ugh, they look like raw hamburger."

"They're doing all right."

"Did you put in your drops while I was off gallivanting?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I forgot."

"Forgot! The doctor said every four hours."

"I'll do it in the bus."

"Hazard, you are the most exasperating idiot." She paced back and forth with arms crossed over her chest and hands tucked under the arms, her voice rising. "You are not a soldier. Nobody's going to give you a purple heart for going blind on a trip in England."

"People are sleeping," he hissed, nodding at the darkened cottages.

"You read too many war comics as a kid, saw too many Davy Crockett movies." She assumed the hand-on-heart pose and the phony voice of a soapbox orator. "The warrior marches on through ambushes and explosions, his legs tied up in splints, bandages around his skull, a bullet clenched between his teeth."

"Sierra—"

" 'Don't bother about me,' the warrior says. 'See to the women and children.' " She was nearly shouting. "Great masochistic idiocy, is what it is."

"Stop the lecture and listen."

The diesel growl was unmistakable. As the organist had predicted, it was a few minutes early. Headlights, bumper gleam, lighted rectangular destination board on the forehead of the bus. EDINBURGH, the lighted panel read. The bus slowed down for Lesser Buzzard, then whisked past into the night again without stopping.

Hazard spun around on the curb, fist raised, and shouted, "Hey, you son of a bitch!"

"Shush, people are sleeping," Sierra mimicked. She was laughing as the tail-lights vanished northward. "So much for British transport."

"You think it's funny for us to freeze out here because some sawdust-brained driver forgot to pick us up?"

"Don't you think it's funny?"

The sudden calming of her voice warned him that she wanted a serious answer. One of her little tests, to see how many rooms there were inside his head, to see how resilient a husband he would be. So he thought about the two of them stranded there at midnight in Lesser Buzzard, and he knew it was absurd, hilarious. "The organist has a couch," he said at last.

"Let's go ask about it," she said.

Before they could stir, however, a second bus growled into view, with EDINBURGH emblazoned on the front, and it also roared past. They turned to watch it hasten by, like spectators at a horserace. Then a third bus whistled through, and a fourth, each one with a driver hunched over the wheel as if divining his fortune from the paint stripes on the highway. After the fifth bus, Hazard moaned, "I don't believe this."

"Maybe it's an evacuation," Sierra said giddily. "Maybe they're ferrying the whole population of London to Edinburgh."

As she spoke, a sixth bus wheezed to a stop in front of them. When the door opened like an accordion, they stood for a moment peering in at the driver. "Those rucksacks will have to be stowed down below," he called out gravely. So he was not a mirage. "A bit cold, like," he observed while shoving the packs into the luggage hold in the belly of the bus. "Two seats for you in the back, and laprugs overhead. We reach Edinburgh at five-forty." He spoke with the weightiness of a seacaptain discussing an ocean passage.

Hazard smelled travel-worn bodies and damp wool as he moved down the aisle of the bus. Murmurs, snores, underwater burbling. In the feeble light the heads of the other passengers looked like charred stumps. By the rear window, where the exhaust fumes seemed dense enough to float in, they found two seats. The laprugs proved to be tartan blankets, sumptuous foretokens of Scotland.

"It's worth being cold just to cuddle under one of these," Sierra whispered.

"So cuddle up with your favorite stoic," Hazard whispered back, swollen with contentment now. Amazing, that a ticket purchased in Cambridge had made this machine halt for them in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night. Sierra's breath smelled faintly of jasmine. Beneath the woolen blankets, his fingers searched out the waistband of her jeans.

She clamped her hand down over his groping fingers. "Not with those icy paws. Warm them up first. Meanwhile, hand over those eyedrops."

Hazard stopped chafing his palms together. "They're down in the whale's belly, inside my pack."

"In your pack? You really do want to go blind. We've got to stop this bus."

When she started to rise, he grabbed her by the wrist and squeezed. "If you raise a ruckus, I'll get off and walk back to Memphis, I swear it."

"Sure you will. Blind. Across the ocean."

He did not answer, but he kept his grip on her wrist. Then in her stillness he grew ashamed, let her go. "I'm sorry. That's just the way I'm made."

"The way you're made is pigheaded."

In the seat in front of theirs, a body stirred heavily and a baby whimpered. A woman's voice, ragged with exhaustion, cooed and lullabied. But the baby would not be comforted and the whimpers soon turned to howls.

"You're suffering from a superman complex, you are."

"The baby," he whispered.

"Won't take medicine, won't take money, won't take help. Won't even take love when you need it most. Touch me not. Lone oak tree in the pasture, daring the lightning to strike."

The baby's wailing shushed her at last. Wrapping herself in the blanket from ankle to neck, barricaded against his fumbling hands, Sierra turned away from him toward the aisle and pretended to sleep. Within a few minutes she really did sleep.

Hazard stared out the window at the rhomboids of light dragged along the ground by the bus. Then his eyes throbbed so painfully that he had to squeeze them shut. He didn't want to go blind. He didn't want this stubborn separation. But part of him really seemed to be made of oak, and would not unbend.

The baby's crying rose and fell, pitched from octave to octave, played through all the registers of discontent like a concerto of pain. It's not anguish, Hazard tried to persuade himself. Babies simply cry, they are made to cry. Yet he could not shut out the mournful wailing. It clawed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at some vulnerable tissue in his brain. If he could only clutch the baby and carry it around tucked under his chin, as he used to carry his youngest sister, singing ballads about moonshiners and lonesome freight trains.

Finally Hazard opened his eyes, and they felt like two coals burning in his face. Between the seats he could see the mother had the baby stomach-down across her lap, and was rubbing its back with her palm. It doesn't want that, he thought, it wants to be squeezed with both arms against a chest, hear a heartbeat, be saved from this growling night-ride among strangers. Unable to stand the wailing any longer, he leaned forward and murmured between the seats, "Maybe I could carry her up and down the aisle."

The mother grappled the baby to her chest, rocking back and forth with a low moaning that sounded like the bus tires on the road. Her arms quivered.

"I'm used to babies," he whispered.

The woman's dog-tired face turned around and gave him a look as if he had offered to disembowel the child instead of comfort it. She turned away again without speaking. Another one of your patented idiocies, Sierra would have observed. Hazard squeezed a fistful of the tartan blanket in each hand and pressed the cloth against his ears. Muffled by the wool, the baby's cry and the mother's crooning blended with the steady thrum of the bus. Just before he closed his eyes, he saw through the window the first dusting of snow, like powdered sugar on the black earth. The last thing he felt before sleep was Sierra's head nuzzling over against him, her fingers creeping between the buttons of his shirt. Her breathing was as rhythmic as a dulcimer strum.

*

Next thing he knew, Sierra was nibbling at his throat. "Edinburgh, you lazy oaf. We're here." Luggage was grating down from the overhead rack, bodies were lurching past. No road sounds, no mournful baby.

His eyes would not open. Touching, he found the lids encrusted with mucus, the lashes gritty with it.

"Don't rub," Sierra warned. "They're a mess. First thing we're going to do after we get unloaded here is plunk in some of those drops."

"But I can't get them open." He was ashamed of the fear in his voice.

"Let the witchdoctor have a look." Her fingers gingerly brushed the mattering along his lids. She smelled of sleep, stillness. "Now try."

This time he managed to force the eyes open. Two knife wounds. He howled, squeezed them shut and clamped his teeth against the pain.

"We've got to get you to a doctor," she said in alarm.

"He'll just fish around with his flashlight, and give me the same prescription the guy in Cambridge did."

"Will you let me put in the drops?"

"I guess."

"All right. Can you see well enough to get off the bus?"

"Sure. Just a little sore. They'll be okay after I use them a while."

"Button up then," she told him. "There's six inches of snow out there. And let me fold that gorgeous blanket." He felt the laprug slither across his legs. "Try to imagine anything half so handsome on a bus in America."

"The baby?" he asked.

"Already got off, poor thing. The mother looked like she'd just rowed across the Atlantic. You could put her face on birth-control posters." Hazard sat listening to her stupidly, hands dangling slack between his knees, paralyzed by the fire in his eyes. "Up with the hood, now. Tie the string under the little chinny-chin-chin. That's right. Now on with the mittens. What a good boy!" Sierra's laugh was the warmest sound he had heard since the organist clapped his keyboard shut. "Who needs a baby," she said, "when I have you?"

Angered by that, Hazard surged to his feet, and nearly knocked himself senseless on the luggage rack. Sierra groped for his hand, but he drew back from her and said, "Go on, go on, the baby will follow."

Eyes slitted open and head tilted back, he could just barely keep track of her brisk legs in front of him. The driver was dishing out luggage, calling the names of passengers with his seacaptain's bravado. Beside the front wheel their rucksacks leaned against one another like two drunks, like two mourners—like his grandparents after fifty years of marriage. Sierra already had the eyedrops out. "Sit down on this bench," she ordered him. "Head on my lap. Good. Left eye first, good and wide." He forced the lid open with his fingers, and the drops seared down on his eye like boiling grease. "Now the right. That's it. There now." He squeezed the sides of the bench and tried to keep his legs from twitching. But for a few seconds his boot heels thumped against the wood. Then the medicine caught hold, the numbness arrived. He realized from the way her fingers were slicking across his cheeks that he had been crying, and he lifted his head from her lap at once, sat up.

"Right," he blustered. "Let's see the city." He dried his face with the backs of his rabbitskin gloves.

"You've got no business looking at anything with those eyes," she said. "You need to keep the medicine in them and keep them shut."

"Where's the map? Where's the *Blue Guide?*" He tried to stand up, but she pushed down on his shoulders.

"Just sit, I'll get them," she said. "At least keep your eyes closed while I dope out the walking tour." He could hear the scuffle of the rucksacks as she dragged them to the bench, then the abrupt purr of a zipper, the crinkle of the map unfolding. "Stubborn as cement," she muttered. "Superman. Great lumbering pudding-brained mule. Olympic champion in long distance suffering."

"Just read the map."

"Here's the bus station," she grumbled, "and that must be Princes Street. So Holyrood Castle is down that way, and the castle up at that end." She grumbled on about streets and parks and museums, not really talking to him. Her fingernail made a skittering noise on the map as she traced their itinerary. It was hard to follow her voice amidst the din of bus horns, loudspeakers, diesel engines. Finally she announced that the all-time premier one-day walking tour of Edinburgh was doped out. She made him

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sit tight while she stashed the rucksacks in a locker. When she came back she handed him a cold slick ball—an orange, his fingers told him—and said, "First installment on breakfast."

As he followed her out of the station, eyes cracked open just enough to see the glistering lamplit sidewalks, he peeled the orange with bare hands, stuffing the rind in his pocket. Each time he bit down on a section of the fruit he wondered how far these juices had traveled to reach him before dawn in this frozen city.

Very few cars crunched through the snowglazed streets. Here and there a shop window was lit. Men unloading trucks at the curb hefted cartons and sacks onto their shoulders. A pair of shivering dogs nosed at trashcans.

Sierra talked her way into a bakery that was not yet officially open, and she purchased half a dozen hot rolls. From a horsedrawn milkcart that was rumbling over the cobblestones on its morning rounds, she bought a slab of butter. "Spare no expense!" she cried gaily. So they ate butter-drenched rolls with mugs of hot chocolate at a cafe. Hazard no longer thought to record the prices on the card in his wallet. Whenever they halted, he shut his eyes. Closed, they let his mind attend to other things. But when they were open even a slit, their fire obliterated all other sensations.

"You look like a basket case," Sierra informed him at the cafe.

"And feel like one," he admitted.

"Why don't you just leave them closed and I'll lead you around."

"I'll see a fat lot of Edinburgh that way."

"I can tell you about things."

"Seeing-eye-dog," he said.

"Woof, woof."

He laughed, eyes closed, playing the blind man. Clink of spoons against saucers. Burr on all the Scottish voices. The table still felt damp from its morning once-over with the washrag.

But in the street again he pulled his arm free of her guiding hand, forced his eyes open. "I'm all right. Where to first?"

"Royal College of Surgeons, to have you vivisected and stuffed." She went huffing away down the sidewalk, salt and ice scrunching beneath her boots.

Hazard could not keep up with her. In his watery daze he shouldered into a man who was rolling a barrel with his foot. Then when Sierra nipped across the street, he stumbled on the curb and fell sprawling. Brutal smack of pavement on wrists, elbows, chin. Tires grinding to a halt near his head. Sierra's hands under his arm, dragging him upright, scolding him.

"You'll get yourself killed." She thumped the snow from his coat and pants, harder than she needed to, hard enough to make him stagger to keep his balance. "Hazard," she said, gripping him fiercely just above his left elbow, "if you pull away from me, or if you open your eyes again before it's time for your drops, so help me I'll throw you under a truck."

So he shambled along beside her, stiffly, reluctantly, feeling the turns he was supposed to make by the pressure of her fingers on his arm, listening to her tell about what there was to see. The awkwardness reminded him of learning to waltz, when his mother had swooped him around the living room to the strains of his father's fiddling. But he had eventually learned to dance like a dervish. And now he found himself relaxing in Sierra's grip.

Mercifully shut, his eyes quit pestering him, and the noises and smells and tastes of the city crept out to meet him. The cold air smacked of coalsmoke. Tires gritted rhythmically on the cobbled streets. Sierra's voice kept playing in his ears, painting visions for him. Princes Street, the gardens with shrubs like white-capped penguins. Clouds of breath around the muzzles of horses pulling the occasional wagon. Children passing on their way to school in little chattering armadas like ducks. Soot-smeared buildings, gables like stairsteps.

"And now here's the monument to Sir Walter Scott," she announced. "Everything our friend the organist said it would be. Two hundred feet tall, according to the book. Looks to me like a giant loblolly pine turned upside down, with the limbs at the bottom. Or maybe a Saturn rocket. Underneath is a statue of Sir Walter himself. They've even got his dog in there with him. Around the sides there's a bevy of statuettes depicting notable characters from his works. The whole gigantic tower's more fretted and pierced and befrilled than a crocheted doily."

A fantastic Edinburgh grew inside him, nurtured by her words. After a few hours of listening he lost all awareness of her voice, and perceived directly whatever she described. He no longer felt her fingers on his arm, but seemed to be fused with her, a four-legged animal. Walking came to feel like dancing, a yielding to music.

In the palace she read to him from the *Blue Guide:* a threnody of murders, invasions and butcheries, relieved only by her comic asides. In the National Gallery she appraised the Titians, the Watteaus, the Gainsboroughs ("The woman here with a peachbasket hat and feather trimmings looks like a bored kitchen-appliances demonstrator."), the acres of portraits. In the Royal Scottish Museum she guided his hand so that he could touch the marble flesh of the statues.

Only when she sat him down on a parkbench and gently pried his eyes open for the next dose of eyedrops, did he retreat into his own body. The scalding pain was briefer this time. He was in no hurry to lift his head from her lap.

"Not so bloodshot," she observed. "I can almost stand to look at you. Keep this up the rest of today, and I might let you open them tomorrow. Might even consent to marry you."

That sat him bolt upright. "What brought that up?"

"It's never been put away, has it?"

"But why right this minute?"

"Just you, letting me lead you around. Your tender side isn't all that bad—considering you're a pigheaded mule and all."

"I'll show you my tender side," he bellowed with mock ferocity, groping toward her voice with strangler's hands.

"Eyes shut!" she cried. He could hear her leaping

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the bench and skipping away a few paces over the snowpacked walk. "Can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread woman!"

Arms outspread like a lateshow monster, he lurched blindly after her. By calling to him she led him bump against a tree, a lamp-post, a fire hydrant, her laugh giddying high above his. Then after she had been silent for half a minute, he nudged forward against softness and felt her arms closing around him, her lips on his face.

Following the organist's advice, they climbed up to the castle an hour before sunset, her hand on his arm, her voice supplying his vision. "Site of an Iron Age fort," she informed him. "Home of the unlucky Mary Queen of Scots. Birthing place of James I and other bigwigs. Blood soaked nine feet into the basalt rock, by actual measure."

She described the bejeweled crowns, the gold-hilted swords, the armor—some of which, she told him, looked as if it had been hammered out of tin cookie-sheets. Then she led him into a chamber of the castle where her voice reverberated off the stone walls. "Scottish War Memorial," she whispered. The other conversations he could hear were also hushed. "Flags," she murmured. "And here's a great big book inside a glass case. Names of the dead."

Just then the hush was shattered by a brusque clicking of heels over the floor. The sound clattered straight toward Hazard, then stopped. A harsh military voice: "Sir, this is a holy place, and you will please uncover your head."

"Of course, I didn't realize," Hazard stammered, fumbling the hood back, tugging loose the knitted cap.

"Officious bully," Sierra murmured. Squeezing Hazard's arm protectively, she led him away.

After a few seconds the clicking heels approached again, but this time hesitantly. The voice was softened into a lovely Scottish singsong: "I'm so very sorry, Sir. I didn't realize your condition."

"It's nothing," Hazard reassured him.

"But it was a terrible rudeness. Here, let me open this case for you, here now, run your hands over the page. Can you feel the ink?"

Hazard shied back from the man's touch, not wanting his sympathy, not wanting him to feel badly. "I'm not blind. No offense at all. It's just a soreness keeps them shut, some kind of infection."

The man's voice, minty, came from a few inches away now. "Infection, is it? Here, let's have a look." And before Hazard could flinch away there were fingers prodding one lid open. "Aye, that's your redeye, that is. Know it from the war. North Africa. Douse it with salt water, is what you do. Be gone in a week."

Suddenly the hand jerked away and Sierra was angrily crying, "Leave him alone, can't you see he's in pain?"

"It doesn't matter," Hazard tried to explain. But Sierra was dragging him away.

Outside the chapel, she huffed, "Bully. Poking at a blind man."

"I'm not blind."

"Prying at you as if you were a chucksteak. Ought to have his thumbs broke. Put a uniform on a man and it's instant Napoleon. I should have clobbered him, mauling you like that."

"It's over," he soothed, "forget it."

She took a great calming breath, let it out. They walked across the castle grounds until their footsteps no longer struck echoes from the walls, until their bodies danced in that single-animal harmony. The air tasted like a stainless steel spoon, it was so cold. Even through the crust of snow, Hazard could sense the uneven tilt of the paving stones. The jitter of traffic sounded impossibly far away. He didn't care where they were headed, didn't think of supper or hotel or Memphis or any other destination, but only let himself blend into the flow of their movement together.

"There's actually a little cemetery here for soldiers' dogs," Sierra told him. Then she gasped. "Good Lord."

"What's the matter?"

"The sunset."

Hazard waited in darkness for her to describe what she saw. But the only sound she made was a hectic breathing, the way she sometimes panted when making love. "How does it look?" he finally asked.

"Oh, words are useless," she said. "But I'll try. The clouds are a flat gray overhead like an iron pot lid, and then just above the horizon there's a gap between the clouds and the hills. A crack in the edge of the world, and you can see it whichever way you turn," her boots scuffing around on the stone, "a full circle of light. And in the southwest the bottom of the sun is melting down through the clouds, a fierce crescent of red. You can actually see it dropping, melting through, and the light burnishes all the hills and roofs and treetops. Like faces catching the firelight. And the snow looks like coals. Lava slung out over the countryside. Here it comes, the whole sun is burning through the gap now, a great round door into a furnace. Oh Hazard, come, turn your face this way," and she took his chin in her hand, aimed his face until he sensed the scarlet glow through his eyelids. "Just for a second now, open them, open them. It's worth the pain."

And through a haze he glimpsed the fiery landscape, the blazing eye. The earth and the sun and sky were all one liquid flame. Sierra's face was tilted up close to his, watching him watch the sun. Her hood was thrown back, and the light streaming through her hair made her seem molten. And he also felt molten, yielded up, set free.

Walking down from the castle terrace with eyes shut again and Sierra's hand on his arm, he caught the distant wail of a bagpipe. Listening, picking the notes out above the sounds of footsteps and traffic, he recognized the tune, a reel his father had taught him to play on the fiddle. The smell of stacked walnut planks and cherry came back to him, and the feel of the wood-handled tools made his fingers curl inside their gloves. He wanted to build fiddles and dulcimers, wanted to finish the pear-wood banjos, and he would let Sierra earn the money so long as she wanted to, would let her fold him into her love so long as she would have him.

"Let's go ahead with it," he said, "if you think it's right for you."

"Marrying?"

"Yes," he said.

"Yes," she answered. □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VERA INBER

NIGHTINGALE AND ROSE

Translated, from the Russian, by Marian Schwartz

The recipe for spring is as follows: start with perfectly fresh and piquant buds swimming in sunshine and sprinkled over an old poplar. (Taking deep breaths of their aroma is recommended. It's one of the most marvelous in the world.) A slender moon in its very first quarter, enormous, even bigger than at the full moon, rises over a finely whipped cloud. As the moon rises, a warm, ponderous rain falls: one drop a minute. A bundle of tiny blue cupolas on a little hundred-year-old church in Uspensky Lane begins to shine under the stars. Beneath an old poplar, in the churchyard fragrant with grass, a kiss is heard: one long and two short. Moscow spring is ready.

Seasoned with a concertina from the basement premises of a bakery and a far-off rumble of breaking tram waves, this spring is to be swallowed greedily, but when overdone its effects can be trying, and an overflowing of the heart can be agonizing. In other countries there are other, more magnificent springs. Classic springs with roses and nightingales. But if you look closely you'll find nightingales and roses in Moscow, too. Under the hazy Moscow sky the nightingale languishes; there are thorns on the rose, and the rose pricks. That's the recipe for spring.

If you look closely you'll find a nightingale in Uspensky Lane. There's a house across from the little blue-cupolaed church, and in its basement a bakery where, of an evening, a concertina sighs like yeasted dough. On the first floor the tailor Emanuel Nightingale "makes civil and military uniforms to measure; alterations."

Nightingale the tailor consists of slender legs, rounded shoulders, a reddish bald patch, and slightly vacant, sky-blue eyes. It's rare for a Jew from Minsk to be blue-eyed, but when it does happen such blue Jewish eyes are astonishing for their otherworldly expression. A Jew like that might just as well be sailing in the ark, looking down on the world from the heights of Ararat. Sometimes those clients of Nightingale the tailor poorly acquainted with his nature would be horrified at those eyes and would tell themselves that all was lost, that their herringbone trouser cloth was going to be cut out in a trapezoid, their jacket armholes much too big, as though a shark had bitten them out, and the collar was going to bristle like an ailing self-esteem. But that's only what those who didn't know Nightingale the tailor thought. Nightingale the tailor was reborn over his work. His mystical eyes narrowed, like a snake charmer's. With a bit of chalk in his hand, pins in his mouth, and a tape measure around his neck, he worked charms. Sluggish material would submit to the artist: from sprawling woollen chaos there would emerge a beautiful, fluid line, and riding breeches would bloom like a lotus. While working, and in spite of the pins in his mouth, Nightingale the tailor would sing selected parts from the *Song of Songs*, which he himself had set to music. He particularly loved Solomon's melodious phrases: "Strengthen me with wine, comfort me with apples, for I am faint from love." Hearing the introductory, signal trills of his voice, Rose, Nightingale the tailor's wife (for every nightingale has his rose), would tell five-year-old Izzy, a terrible scamp:

"Izzy! Stop hammering at that nail! Who am I talking to! You heard me, your father's singing 'I am faint from love.' That means he's gotten to the sleeves and you'd better be quiet."

"But I don't want to," Izzy answered, and hammered another nail into his miserable horse's croup.

Nightingale the tailor's wife Rose was immoderately luxuriant and surrounded by thorns. She loved Nightingale and, loving him, was jealous of all the other flowers on earth. Particularly dangerous in this regard to her mind was the baker's wife, Klavdiya Makarovna, who was as

---

VERA INBER is a Soviet author, best known as a poet and a strong Stalinist. MARIAN SCHWARTZ is a translator living in New York; she is preparing a collection of stories by Russian women authors.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

round as a bun and had a dimple in her chin so deep it seemed a raisin had lodged there and then fallen out.

"Why does that woman," Rose said to Nightingale as she settled into their feather bed alongside him, "why does that Klavdiya look at you sideways? Why does she look at *me* sideways? Because she has a guilty conscience. Emanuel, my Nyuma, I'm telling you that you like her."

"Rosochka," Nightingale objected gently from under the blanket, "how can you think that?"

"Well, let's just suppose. So what were you talking about with her this morning through the window while you were ironing the grey vest?"

"Rosochka, I wasn't talking to her. She was telling me there would still be cold spells in May, Rosochka."

"Well, so let's suppose it was cold spells. What did you tell her, Emanuel?"

"I told her, Rosochka, and perfectly coolly—how could you think anything otherwise?—I told her, even Izenka heard me, I told her to move aside, precious, or I would simply suffocate. You're my joy."

So Rose hid her thorns, and Rose, fragrant with love and onion sauce, yielded to Nightingale. An hour passed that way. Then Rose fell asleep, but Nightingale didn't. In the corner of the shop (also the bedroom) one or another unfinished jacket usually hung on a wooden block. Slyly it would wink a button and carry on mute conversations with the sleepless Nightingale.

"Well then, my fine fellow," said the jacket, "why aren't you asleep? Wasn't it time long ago? You've still got a lot of work ahead of you. Yesterday during the fitting I clearly hinted to you that there's something wrong with my tucks."

"Tucks!" replied Nightingale, his sky-blue eyes shining thoughtfully. "What do you mean there's something wrong with your tucks! There's something wrong with my soul."

"But why?" queried the jacket, with a yawn of its pocket. "Why? I don't understand at all. You and Rose. . . ."

"Rosaliya Abramovna and I, of course. And our Izenka is a wonderful little boy. There he is sleeping in his little bed, as quiet as a thimble. But what does Solomon say about that? 'By night in my bed I sought my soul's beloved, I sought him but found him not.' "

"I don't understand," continued the jacket, furrowing its lapel. "I'm surprised at you. Does this mean you're unhappy with family life, Emanuel?"

"You troublemaker," shot back the agitated Nightingale. "Keep quiet, you two-faced scoundrel. You're trying to get me to make confessions. I can see right through you. You're sewn with white thread, and you have a repulsive lining."

And turning his back on the jacket Nightingale fell asleep. Outside the window, in the lane, paling, spring flamed, and the stars rustled silverly.

Let's move the hands of the moon back half a year to January. In Uspensky Lane the wind is whistling, the snow is falling luxuriantly. The snow is resting like crowns of sugar on the cupolas of the church, snow is falling on the churchyard, on Izenka, the little Nightingale-robber, in his felt boots and mama's kerchief, on the older Nightingale's sign. Snow is falling on all the world.

One snowy morning the doorbell rang.

"That must be someone from that shady Nowthen character for the service jacket," said Rose. (It should be noted that Nowthen is not a surname. It's just that this client had a habit of saying "now then" at the start of every sentence, which for some reason made him extremely shady in Rose Nightingale's eyes.) "That must be Nowthen," said Rose. "Is the service jacket ready, Emanuel?"

"The service jacket's ready, Rosochka," replied Nightingale. "But I'm afraid it's someone come for Leibovich's Passover trousers, which *aren't* ready. He brought them in to be done over for the New Year."

At that point the doorbell rang once again.

Rose opened the door, which was quilted with oil cloth and felt, and silently stepped back. In the doorway, in fur, in snow, her hands hidden in fur sleeves, stood a woman, a very beautiful woman, and asked whether the tailor Nightingale was at home.

"He's home," replied Rose, but a question: "What do you want? Have you come for Leibovich's Passover trousers?" continued Rose, doubtfully taking in her fur coat and long eyelashes.

"No, I'm not from Leibovich. I'm from myself. I need a suit. Riding breeches and a service jacket. How do you do."

"For you? For you personally?"

"For me. For me personally."

"Strengthen me with wine, comfort me with apples," Nightingale whispered through trembling lips and grasped the tape measure hanging around his neck with both hands so as not to keel over.

"Here's your Nowthen," thought Rose, glancing at her high felt overshoes. "This one's a real live Nowthen for sure. . . ."

Nowthen sat on the pitted chair that usually served Izzy as a stable. Fluttering her eyelashes at Nightingale, Nowthen confirmed that she needed riding breeches and a service jacket out of navy cheviot (here's the cheviot) for the stage, that she was an actress, that Citizen Nightingale had been recommended to her as an inexpensive and very very decent Nightingale. And that they should take her measurements because she was in a hurry.

She was in a hurry. Hastily she threw off her fur coat. She was wearing long earrings and green stones around her neck. She stood in front of the sourly-vinegary mirror and proferred Nightingale her arms, shoulders, knees—everything he asked for.

And Rose, silent and fuming, all in thorns, took down her measurements.

"Waist 68, Rosochka," said Nightingale. "You have such a slender, supple waist," he said to Nowthen, "I simply don't know how I'll cut it out."

Rose coughed and Nightingale nearly swallowed a pin.

"Chest 84, Rosochka," announced Nightingale in a chastened voice.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rose took it all down in silence. Rose was so terribly silent that Izzy started crying, claiming a horse bit him.

Then, once again, like a silver spoon into its case, Nowthen disappeared into her fur coat, and having made an appointment for the fitting she dipped her eyelashes into the sky-blue radiance of Nightingale's eyes and vanished.

"Beautiful are your cheeks 'neath your pendants, your neck in jewels," Nightingale sang to himself, covering the navy cheviot with chalk marks. "Your chest is 84. And your eyelashes are at least half a centimeter long. Simply stunning." And, delicately fluttering like swallows, his scissors flew over the navy cheviot, although it was of very indifferent quality.

The suit was finished and delivered by Rose herself to the address given: the Arbat, Nikolo-Peskovsky Lane. The suit was finished and delivered and forgotten. But as long as it was being sewn and fitted an iron cloud hung over the Nightingale house. Rose grew pinched-looking and, out of worry and anguish, became friendly with the baker's wife, Klavdiya Makarovna. Left to his own devices, Izzy picked up ringworm. As for Nightingale, his eyes became so unbearably blue that when he brought the January rent to the house management they didn't take anything from him for water.

The suit was delivered and forgotten.

But then half a year passed. And it was spring in Uspensky Lane. . . .

Nightingale the tailor, his energy sapped by his daily work and springtime lassitude, sat by the window at twilight and heard kisses in the churchyard: two long and one short. A beautiful, heavy cloud lay in the west. But it wasn't going to rain. Except that warm drops would fall: one a minute. The moon was slender. The overflowing of his heart was agonizing. And Nightingale said to Rose:

"Rosochka, how about going to the cinema?"

The Electric Charms Cinema is full of lovers. Darkness falls. A whisper, like the wind, passes from row to row. Hand in hand, cheek to cheek, the lovers follow the heroes' adventures. With them they leap onto horses, dive into frothing waterfalls, uncover nests of fascists. Through the singing ventilator pours the delicate air of spring. And in the back rows a fireman languishes terribly, sniffing invisible fires all around him.

Today the Electric Charms Cinema is showing a Russian action picture, *Flood in Mine Shaft No. 17-bis.* Darkness falls. A wedge of light props its broad point against the screen. The action moves, flies along. The criminal hand prepares the catastrophe. The criminal hand has already made an opening in the mine shaft through which, at the fateful hour, the water will surge. But his evil intentions have been guessed. In the mine shaft, over suspended footbridges and passages, through a web of crossbeams, the woman destined to prevent this calamity makes her way.

Swooning, sitting in the Electric Charms as close together as birds on telephone lines, the lovers hear a cry:

"My riding breeches! Stop! Stop!"

Mine shaft no. 17-bis vanishes. The lights blaze on, and a policeman appears alongside the sky-blue-eyed man in the bowler.

"Citizens," he says, "no one leaves here until the riding breeches stolen in the confusion of darkness are returned to their rightful owner."

"Emanuel," whispers Rose, "you've disgraced me for ever and for good."

"I'm sorry," Nightingale, trembling, replies to the policeman. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way at all. The riding breeches really are mine, my work. She's wearing them. The lady rescuer from mine shaft no. 17-bis. When I saw them in the air I just got confused. So high up and such risky movements. I was even frightened for the sideseams."

"It wasn't any seams you were frightened for, Emanuel," sobs Rose, "it was that woman you were frightened for. Too bad she didn't break her neck. For shame, you, a family man."

Rose sleeps all in tears. But Nightingale, stung by love, can't sleep. There's a sprinkling of stars over the Square of the Passion. Bowler-less, Nightingale walks through the lanes toward the Square of the Passion, not even noticing where he was going.

He saw that woman with eyelashes half a centimeter long two times. First, when she brought the navy cheviot. Then when she had it fitted. Now, here, he had seen her a third time, in the air, her hair streaming over the mine shaft, her collar opened flat, her eyelashes spread wide.

Nightingale walks through the night, alone. In front of him is a couple. They are walking hand in hand, cheek to cheek. They walk harmoniously, like a single person, but still there are two of them, and they're happy. Gradually coming to his senses after the flood in the mine shaft, Nightingale begins to see and hear. A dark girl, a gypsy possibly, is selling flowers on the Square of the Passion. In her swarthy hands the petals look even more scarlet, the stems green, like poison.

"Buy a little flower," she accosts the two walking in front of Nightingale. "Buy a little rose," she says to the youth, "buy it for your beauty, for the light of your life."

And Nightingale, delirious with electric charms, bewitched by the woman from the mine shaft suspended in light, although it's not even offered him, buys for her, for his beauty, for the light of his life, a thornless red rose, a beautiful night rose of love. He carries it to the address given: the Arbat, Nikolo-Peskovsky Lane. He gives it to the yardman and asks him to give it to her immediately. A note is attached to the rose:

"I saw you today in the second seance. My name is unimportant, but I'll never forget you."

After which he is overcome by such weakness he begins to tremble all over, as though he'd been carrying not a rose but a steam iron. His lips become parched, they thirst for refreshment, they're perishing from fever. And on the Arbat, walking up to a state produce stall, he softly says through his singed mouth:

"I beg of you, comfort me with apples, for I am faint from love." □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EARTHQUAKE COUNTRY

The last of the tsunamis
from a seismic past rolls
over the hill, in fact
is the hill.
Black sage shivers,
brief sea-surface of artemesia,
all poised for a different season.
The hill is ready with buckwheat's
autumn rust beside summer froth,
mustard's brown mesh, past yellow
absorbed in the larger element.
It is prepared with upthrusts of
white sage, crests of chemise, &
dry spume of pearly everlasting,
all tossed together by the wind
making them spring back more distinct.

Weeks it's taken me to see
scrub turn wave &
wave to beauty poised
to overwhelm yet only
breaking in on us with dry
flowers in a Japanese teacup
splashing over the scrub-oak's
green rock, leaving it
fresher & intact.

Now gathering dead ahead of this
boat's old pine posts,
it slowly raises us on
unseen counterpoint
of groundswells to a sky
going on & on as skies at sea do,
over white butterflies,
symbol of the soul,
hummingbirds, image
of resurrection, &
banking
thwart-beam
out of the canyon
one
solitary
raven.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FOUR CIRCULAR STORIES

SCHEMING

RESEARCHING

UNLOADING

RECHANNELING

REVERSING

INVESTING

SPECULATING

SELLING

REGROUPIN

PROFITING

DISENGAGIN

LISTENING

PRAYING

BORROWING

PANICKING

BUYING

WEIGHING

RISKING

CALLING

WATCHING

INTRODUCING

RESPONDING

PROPOSING

CALCULATING

BALANCING

REGRETTING

RESCINDING

SHUFFLING

ENTICING

BLUFFING

PERSUADING

CAJOLING

BARGAINING

POSTPONING

QUESTIONING

REASONING

SUGGESTING

RESUMING

DISSUADING

SCHEDULING

ANSWERING

REMEMBERING

ARRANGING

LISTENING

WAITING

EXPLAINING

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RUNNING

BREATHING

REJUVENATING

PUMPING

ENJOYING

HURTING

EXTENDING

WEAVING

FLYING

BOBBING

RECHARGING

PANTING

RESOUNDING

WALKING

PACING

CONCENTRATING

POUNDING

RESUMING

STRETCHING

COOKING

CRAMPING

SERVING

FORCING

EATING

TIMING

CLEANING

PREDICTING

'LANNING

LISTENING

HOPPING

TESTING

INSPECTING

ROTATING

APPRAISING

MIXING

DECIDING

CUTTING

ORDERING

SCRAPING

DELIVERING

MEASURING

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ is a New Yorker, a critic, a concretist, etc. He is to be one of five DAAD writers-in-residence in Berlin later this year.

—Richard Kostelanetz

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stephen Dixon:

Experimental Realism

"14 Stories" would be a good title for a volume's collection, and it is *(14 Stories*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), but for Stephen Dixon the notion is adequate to describe just one short piece, the book's title story (twelve others follow). "Eugene Randall held the gun in front of his mouth and fired," Dixon begins, where others might conclude. "The bullet smashed his upper front teeth, left his head through the back of his jaw, pierced an ear lobe and broke a window that overlooked much of the midtown area." Already we know more about the shell's trajectory than we do about poor Eugene, but who's to say the little signs and symbols of his worldly life were more important than the path of that utterly realistic bullet?

As a lesson in phenomenology à la Alain Robbe-Grillet, "14 Stories" might stop right there. But for Steve Dixon there's always more to say. Even his rigors of surface description take us elsewhere: the gun's sound has penetrated several floors of the hotel, one of his suicide notes has drifted out the broken window, and the bullet itself lands a block away on a brownstone roof, startling a boy and beginning a complicated episode, the effects of which reach far into the future. A maid must clean up the gory mess (suicides are so thoughtless!), a young couple argue over what to do with the recovered note, and on and on through a series of consequences no less real because they don't touch Eugene Randall's fading life in the cozily humanistic way conventional realists have taught readers to expect.

"Novels are cluttered with all kinds of signals," experimentalist Gilbert Sorrentino has complained, "flashing and gesturing so that the author may direct our attention to a particular configuration of character or plot in order that his work, such as it is, may be made simpler for him, and for us." Hence all the bits and pieces from real life which fill up conventionally realistic novels: makes of autos, tastes in music, styles and quality of clothes. "Such signals," Sorrentino argues, "assure us that we are here, oh yes, in the world that we understand." But what we "understand" are the signals, reference points to a world we inhabit, "and we are thus being told what we already know." Fiction becomes less art and more news from the world; by pantomiming with signs, the writer has been able "to slip out from under problems that only confrontation with his materials can solve."

Dixon's talent is to stick it out with his materials, *to write fiction with them*, and so he never lets his signifiers rush off into the world in search of the things they represent. Eugene Randall's suicide in a shabby hotel room could easily start a movie running in our heads, but then Steve Dixon's story would be out of control, happening somewhere off the page. Thus we're given no more than one line of it before the chambermaid downstairs starts worrying about the sound, and no more than a single line of that before an equally interesting narrative begins about the kid up the block who's nearly nicked by the shot. Conventional realism may be in part a moral statement about the world, but Steve Dixon is more the experimentalist. Realism, he shows, is a lot more than lazy readers have thought it is, and from sentence to sentence there's a great deal of writing to be done before anyone can sit back and say they know it all.

Unlike the conventional realists who pretend the world is an easy place to have and hold, Dixon knows that things go on. At least six distinct actions take place in the title story, more if every new involvement is counted. Moreover, within each little tale there's an endless regression of fact. For example, the boy's neighbor never should have touched the bullet before calling the police. "If I'd been smart I should have let him pass when he came flying downstairs," the guy admits. "I never should have left my flat for cigarettes—never should have been smoking, in fact. Cancer I'll get, and also a jail sentence. In fact, I never should have taken my first puff when I was young and everyone said don't take your first puff, Willy, because it will lead to bad things. Little did they know. Do you smoke, Warren?" he asks the boy, and we're back to the first level of narrative, ready for more. There's no end to it. *14 Stories?* The book has just thirteen. Fourteen stories to the top floor where Mr. Randall shot himself? Nope, just thirteen, as the thirteenth floor is unnumbered. Fourteen different narratives branching off from Randall's suicide shot? There are probably many, many more.

So many simultaneous interests might be a strategy prompted by the short attention spans and precipitous boredom of contemporary audiences, but this habit of stretching things to their full extent runs through all five of Dixon's books and serves a deeper purpose. In "Mac in Love," the opening story of his first collection, *No Relief* (Ann Arbor: Street Fiction Press, 1976), the narrator's girlfriend is breaking off their affair (a perennial Dixon theme), and under these conditions nothing is simple. A nice day? Sure, blue sky, but there's pollution which can't be seen by the naked eye "because of something to do with particles and refraction," and on and on while the relationship, tenuous even in its best days, is sustained now only by language. Even on his way out the door there are conversations to be stretched to infinity, as in this last variation on a sentence which has grown through preceding paragraphs: "Will you thank Ruth for telling Mrs. Roy to tell Ruth to tell you to tell Mrs. Roy to tell Ruth to tell you your watering can's on the window ledge?" Robbe-Grillet's phenomenological realism is capable of laborious description, but never with such comedy bto hind it—and never with language's own action as its substance.

In Dixon's work a five-hundred word sentence is not unusual. What begins as an attempt to capture it all, as in the sketch of a narrator's comatose father dying in a hospital, ends as a virtual recreation of the old man's helpless state. Simple instructions for communication—blink once if you hear me, twice if you don't—soon extend themselves to the ridiculous even as they try harder and harder, through qualification after qualification, to be effective. The hallmark of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this behavior, and of this style, is persistence. Both Dixon's sentences and his narrators' go on and on, until credibility turns incredible and then back into believability again. Mac keeps saying goodbye until the police warn him, and then again as they carry him off. Another narrator bugs a woman in a cafeteria through all sorts of brushoffs, rejections, threats, physical violence, and mayhem. In Steve Dixon's work there is no simple end to anything.

Dixon's novels are built on similar situations, and their plots show that his way of writing sentences and setting scenes works for full length plots as well. *Work* (Ann Arbor: Street Fiction Press, 1977) is a testimony both to the dogged persistence it takes to find employment and, even more comically, the ridiculous length one must go to to hold a job. Hunting one down takes his narrator one-third of the novel, and that's the easy part. Once employed as a bartender in a restaurant chain he has to cope with a self-contained universe of rules and relationships: how to mix drinks, charge for specials, move traffic, scan papers for bar-talk news, spot company spies, handle rush hour jams, deal with the company union, foil stick-ups, soothe tempers, counsel neurotics, and keep the whole wacky symphony of waiters, dishwashers, assistant managers, cashiers, and customers in tune. And this is just three or four pages into the story. *Work* is a natural for Steve Dixon. If job hassles did not exist, he would have to invent them.

Dixon's second novel, *Too Late* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), takes his two favorite topics—breaking off relationships and suffering complications which run on *ad infinitum*—and rushes them through a breathless experience in the urban jungle, during which four days pass like four minutes of excitement or four centuries of maniacal torture. The narrator's girlfriend leaves him in a movie, the violence of which has sickened her. But she never makes it home. Where is she, and why? The police want to treat it as a brushoff, but the narrator resists this (as always) and is seduced by the universe of other possibilities: abduction, rape, murder, or worse. The very worst that a frightened person can imagine is just what transpires. Kooks and crazies who feed on news sentationalism rush into the narrator's life, and he himself goes through a Jekyll-and-Hyde transformation of losing his job, annoying friends, hassling neighbors, tearing up his apartment, forging a ransom note (to motivate the police), and running off helter-skelter after the shadiest of clues to his lover's whereabouts. *Too Late* is a tangled web of disruptions and distractions, the very stuff of Steve Dixon's fiction which is here shown to be an ever-present possibility of city life.

* * *

The question which stands at the center of Dixon's work—the fragile stability of human relationships or the danger reality has of running off into infinite digressions and qualifications—is answered by the work which synthesizes his talents as a story writer and novelist: the integrated collection, *Quite Contrary: The Mary and Newt Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). These eleven fictions treat the three-year off-and-on affair of a couple the likes of whom run through nearly all of Dixon's work. Such involvements, he says, include endless complications; love begets much more than love in return. Their first meeting and the start of their relationship, for example, are based on parting:

> "I don't know. I don't like the roles. You asking. Why couldn't I have asked you? Because again, I don't want to. Why not whatever we might do only when and if we feel like it? Let's start by leaving here. Do you want to?"
>
> "Yes I do."
>
> "Me too. Then if out front we still want to walk together, okay. And if not, or even going downstairs we want to part, then we do. If we don't want to part on the stairs or in front of the building, and a block away, let's say, we still want to be together, then we will. And on and on like that till either of us doesn't want to be with the other person or both of us doesn't want to stop. Well, sometimes in the future one of us will want to stop, but not until that person says so, okay?"

Dixon's couples are a fated mismatch: he is "too demanding," she has just departed one marriage and doesn't want to be tied down again too soon. Their tendency to break up is in fact the cement of their relationship. If Newt tries to tell a friend that he and Mary are "this time really through," he faces the reply that "Nah, you two are never really through. You're a pair: Tom and Jerry, Biff and Bang. You just tell yourselves you're through to make your sex better and your lives more mythic and poetic and to repeatedly renew those first two beatific weeks you went through."

Like the parting scene in "Mac in Love," these peculiar qualities of the Mary and Newt story lend themselves to articulation—endless articulation—and what otherwise in a relationship might not even be noticed is here endlessly explained. Conversely, a less self-conscious affair might be over and done with before much fiction could be made of it, but Mary and Newt's experience is sustained by language and therefore kept before our imaginative attention.

The story-collection form of *Quite Contrary* lets Dixon use form as well as content to tell his story, and here we see how his views of human relationships and the quality of reality are one. Mary and Newt's rocky affair provides materials for narrative, but also hints for different ways to structure their tale. Indeed, the telling is the story. "Man of Letters" prints sixteen drafts of a single break-up letter which concludes with the decision not to split up at all—a choice encouraged by the textuality of the narrator's own writing. "The Meeting" tries to explain the odd circumstances of a relationship which began with a sustained parting. Under the gun of explaining such odd behavior the narrator finds he can't tell a straight story and so pleads "Let me start again, though keeping my confusion in. I don't know why, but right now that seems important to me"; this self-questioning continues throughout the story and makes its own point (which the puzzling content alone might have obscured). "Em" and "Mary's Piece" are the two narrators' attempts to make sense of one another, and *making sense* is defined as a writing problem (they even discuss submitting these stories to magazines). "The Franklin Stove" begins with the narrator off at a writers' colony, composing a Mary and Newt break-up story; it ends back in his apartment with Mary herself seducing him away from his typewriter (and away from his apparent intention to leave). When the affair does reach its finish (as finally as possible, for the book itself is coming to a close, only ten pages are left) the writer presents an aptly named "Prolog" in which his grief is so massive and disruptive that it can no longer be

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

screamed, spoken, or even typed, "so I type goodnight."

* * *

14 Stories collects several years' worth of Steve Dixon's best. He's published over 125 in all, more than Fitzgerald or Hemingway and at a better rate than John O'Hara's hundred per decade—this in an age which prints very few short stories at all. Without the thematic integration of either *No Relief* or *Quite Contrary, 14 Stories* shows how the true synthesis for any good writer is finally on the level of form. An old man dying in a hospital ("Cut") is the focus of a dozen different actions, including that of relatives, visitors, doctors, nurses, orderlies, and so on, not to mention his own interests. Shifting point of view from paragraph to paragraph thus tells the same story and many different stories all at once; the most common of realistic techniques is here used experimentally, showing how many different realities compete around this pitifully wasted man. Speech and dialogue, two more simple parts of realism, yield marvelously transformative effects simply by juggling consonants ("We were in red, Jane heated on top of me, my sock deep in her funt and linger up her masspole . . ."). A simple event, such as a whirlwind romance and just-as-sudden breakup, is told again and again with the winds of love and disaffection whirling faster each time ("Love Has Its Own Action"); writing this way soon changes reality into utterly absurd improbability, though each step has been small enough that one never knows just where common sense turns crazy.

Life is problematic, Dixon shows, in both its experience and depiction. The type of honesty each demands creates a realism one can never take for granted. Knowing the world—and all that can happen in it—is an epistemological adventure, and it is Steve Dixon's achievement that familiar conventions can be used for such a unique process of reading. There are no *conventions* in his story, for everything is happening quite literally for the very first time.

—Jerome Klinkowitz

Some Places and Ways to Live

Collected Stories, by Paul Bowles, Black Sparrow. $6.00 (paper)

Of all the notable American writers who broke into print in the years following World War II, Paul Bowles has remained perhaps the least known. Though loudly acclaimed by reviewers and writers alike, Bowles' life as an expatriate and his persistent refusal to publicize his own works have resulted in a serious lack of attention from the American reading public. Unlike his younger compatriots (Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, and Norman Mailer, who made their debut at the same time), Bowles has shown little interest in stoking the flame of his own self-esteem. For the past 40 years he has lived abroad, primarily in Morocco, and thus has been far removed from the organs of literary publicity.

During all this time, however, Bowles has not remained silent. His first novel, *The Sheltering Sky,* was published in 1949; since then he has produced more than 20 books of poetry, travel, and fiction, all to outstanding critical reviews. Most recently, under the Black Sparrow imprimatur, he has collaborated with the gifted Moroccan storyteller, Mohammed Mrabet, on a half-dozen volumes that have been taped by Bowles and translated from the Moghrebi.

Gore Vidal, in his introduction to the *Collected Stories,* suggests that one reason for Bowles' lack of popularity is the fact that so few of his stories are located in his native country. That might very well be so. Bowles is fascinated by remote and alien terrains, and most of his stories take place either in Morocco or the Central American jungles. Against these backdrops he projects cultivated, well-educated people of American or European origin who attempt to come to grips with the creatures and cultures they find there. The results are usually frustrating, if not downright fatal; the natives are too impenetrable and the visitors insufficiently imaginative to effect any real communication. Out of these situations, Bowles creates an uneasy, volatile atmosphere in which voices from the two opposing worlds seem to be suspended in bodiless animation, constantly calling to one another, but without the comfort of actually touching. (In his ability to combine both character analysis and atmospheric evocation, Bowles is reminiscent of two disparate but recognizably American talents: Henry James and Edgar Allen Poe.)

The gap (abyss?) between these two world views endows these stories with a unique, almost dialectical, tension. In "A Distant Episode," a professor of linguistics journeys deep into the Moroccan desert to search out new dialects of the Moghrebi language. "Keep on going south," he is told, "and you'll find some languages you never heard of before." He does just that, only to discover an element of ruthlessness about the people that was never apparent in their language. The climax of the story, a real shocker, leaves the reader with the uneasy certainty that there are differences between the various peoples of this world that no amount of understanding can possibly bridge.

"Pastor Dowe at Tacaté" is an equally devastating story about the failure of a missionary to convert a tribe of heathen Indians in the jungles of Central America. Pastor Dowe is so dedicated to his task that he learns the natives' language; nonetheless, even this facility is not enough to enable him to penetrate the murk of their consciousness. Repeatedly, Pastor Dowe plummets into shadows beyond his cognizance, beyond his ability to interpret in his newly acquired tongue. He knows all the right words, and he can make the Indians nod politely, but anywhere closer to the real depths of their souls he simply cannot approach.

But it is in "The Time of Friendship" (the title piece of Bowles' third collection of stories, published in 1967) that the disparity between the two worlds is best illustrated. An older Swiss lady and a teenage Moroccan boy develop an intense relationship in a remote village in the southern part of the country. They take long walks together, they converse passionately, they exchange letters during the summer when the woman returns to Bern. Unfortunately, where the heart reaches, the mind can't always follow; eager to introduce the boy to European ways, the woman painstakingly constructs a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nativity scene out of wood and clay in hopes that he will be induced to share some of the beauty and pageantry of the Christmas celebration. When, instead, the boy demolishes the *crêche* to get at the almonds and candy hidden underneath, the woman sadly realizes that

> across the seasons of their friendship she had come to think of him as being very nearly like herself, even though she knew he had not been that way when she first met him. Now she saw the dangerous vanity at the core of that fantasy: she had assumed that somehow his association with her had automatically been for his ultimate good, that inevitably he had been undergoing a process of improvement as a result of knowing her. In her desire to see him change, she had begun to forget what Slimane was really like. . . .

In each of these stories the presumptuousness of the Western imperialist mind is laid bare with pitiless clarity. Unable to abandon the preconceived role which, by dint of their technologically superior civilization, they feel they ought to play, the Westerners do everything they possibly can to convince those less fortunate that what they have to offer is really fine and truthful. Appearances play a crucial role in this arrogant assumption, with the Westerners often mistaking the passivity of the natives for acquiescence. Because they do not conform either in dress or habit to the civilized norm, the natives (be they Moroccan or Amerindian) appear somewhat less than human, and therefore in need of help. Blinded by this messianic impulse, the Westerner is at first confused and then bewildered by the native's indifference to his appeals. Unable to recognize the native for what he is, the Westerner is lured into an illusion of security that persists even in the face of outright rebellion—that persists even down to the final moment when all hope of security has vanished and the fate of his life is poised along the edge of the knife at his throat.

Bowles' ability to project himself into the primitive mind is extraordinary. It is a risky thing for any Western writer to attempt, the result quite often being pure sentimental hash, a cloying recloaking of dusky skins in familiar spiritual garb, reminiscent of the best (worst?) of Rudyard Kipling—the "Gunga Din syndrome," it might be called, which is responsible for that most outrageous of all colonial violations, the remaking of a human identity exclusively in the conqueror's terms.

Fortunately, Bowles is too skilled and honest a writer to permit this to happen. His *indigenes* are without compromise, and frequently without mercy. They don't behave like white people because they aren't white people; they act impulsively, whimsically, even brutally on occasion. Within the context of their own lives, they behave with impeccable logic. In "The Delicate Prey" (the title piece of Bowles' first story collection, published in 1950), a renegade tribesman murders a couple of leather merchants, then commits unspeakable acts upon their nephew. Later, when he tries to peddle their goods in a nearby town, he is apprehended and subjected to an act of savage retribution in accordance with the Will of Allah. The story leaves the reader gasping but curiously satisfied; all things are in order, all things have returned to their proper place—the murderer has suffered torments equally as fearsome as those he inflicted, which seems only fitting; life may be nasty and short sometimes, but the cycle, the Life Force, is perfect and unending, and it is to the perpetuation of this unvarying rhythm that a human being must occasionally be sacrificed.

Without question, the appearance of these 39 stories (written between 1939 and 1976) is a major literary event, one for which the people at Black Sparrow Press are to be lauded. The book is handsomely produced, and bound in heavy rag covers that by now have become a Black Sparrow trademark. It is worthwhile noting, too, that it was a "small press" that undertook this important effort, and not a commercial house, which says something about where the heart and spirit of literary publishing lie today.

—Conger Beasley, Jr.

The Right Madness on Skye, by Richard Hugo. Norton. $12.95; $4.95 (paper)

Last year Richard Hugo published two books of poetry, one about the suburb of Seattle where he grew up and one about Scotland where he spent a few months recently on a Guggenheim. Anyone who knows Hugo's work would have expected *White Center* to be a better book than *The Right Madness on Skye.* After all, most of Hugo's work is set in the recognizable landscapes and small towns of the Pacific northwest. No one has rendered more vividly its enormous spaces, wet weather, cold winters, glamorless poverty, isolation, cheap motels, squalid reservations, bars, and endless rivers. For this reason alone, Hugo's readers had long hoped he might take his poetry back to his old neighborhood and the troubled life he knew there. The book on Skye? Well, a fellow can't be blamed for traveling on his Guggenheim.

For all I know, *White Center* may be a better book, but *Right Madness* is a very good effort. That came as a surprise—I think because of two large and unreliable preconceptions of mine about Hugo's work. In the first place, I have always taken his locating and describing of places as evidence in him, at a fundamental level, of a regional realist. He seemed to have much in common with Sherwood Anderson or Edgar Lee Masters, even Edwin Arlington Robinson. Reading my way recently through his other books, however, I saw a Hugo I hadn't seen before, one far less interested in region and regional indentification than

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in what I'm tempted to call myth, a word he sometimes uses himself. "Duwamish No. 2," a poem from his second book, ends with this stanza.

> When the world hurts, I come back alone
> along the river, certain the salt
> of vague eyes makes me ready for the sea.
> And the river says: you're not unique—
> learn how there is one direction only—
> north, and, though terror to believe,
> quickly found by river and never love.

Most of Hugo, then and now, is compressed into these few lines: the sense of private hurt and injury, the loneliness, the ordinariness, all leading to the conclusion that life tends in "one direction only"—a northerly and bitter one—and that it must be lived, essentially, without love. The only consolation is found along the river, which, in Hugo, always implies the complicated, mythical act of fishing.

The most obvious thing about "Duwamish No. 2" is that it could have been written about any river. Place, in a photographically regional sense, is unimportant. The phrase in *Right Madness* is "All places are near . . ." The next most obvious thing is that the key words of the stanza—river, salt, sea, north—are used emblematically, nearly allegorically. In realist writing, words mean first what common usage says they mean, but in this passage the river is first a complex emblem or symbol. As it runs down and out to sea, it is a traditional symbol for the natural, entropic "course" of human life. It is also the place from which life, as in fishing, can be snatched. "Fishing preceded song," says a poem in *Right Madness*. Salt suggests bitterness and tears in this poem almost before it is linked naturally to the sea, and north, as he says in *Right Madness*, is "one direction I've always believed."

It should have come as little surprise that Hugo could write comfortably in and about a place other than his own. He had done it before, of course, in *Good Luck in Cracked Italian*, but that book was so linked to the experiences World War II forced on him that one was not tempted to place it near the center of his writing. Why Scotland, then? A poem from *The Lady in the Kicking Horse Reservoir* hints at an answer. "Drums in Scotland," written on a short visit there in the early seventies, says: "This land/ is tough north music." In other words, the Scottish landscape and, as *Right Madness* suggests, the Scottish experience reach Hugo with their abundant evocations of a bleak, deprived, once violent existence. Here, too, half-way around the world from White Center, is a place, like the southern Italy he was stationed in during the war and later returned to, where life is lived with a kind of minimalist intensity.

As a child of the Depression, Hugo has rendered that intensity often in images that we associate with the photography of Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, the poetry of Carl Sandburg, and the fiction of John Steinbeck. It is quite easy, in fact, to assume—as I did—that Hugo's portrayals of physical and emotional degradation carry with them the unstated liberal and progressive hope for their amelioration.

> The principal supporting business now
> is rage. Hatred of the various grays
> the mountain sends, hatred of the mill,
> the Silver Bill repeal . . .
> ("Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg")

Passages like this can be found throughout Hugo's work, and they reveal a consistent affection for the impoverished, oppressed, and ignored. In *Right Madness*, for instance, we are given several portraits of beggars and displaced crofters, as well as Hugo's delight in playing the role of peasant. All the ingredients for an engaged poetry are there except the engagement. When he said in "Letter to Hanson," "I keep feeling revolutionary/but I have no cause," I tended to discount it. But he said essentially the same thing as far back as his second book in a poem called "Bad Vision at the Skagit."

> Mexican and Serb—bending backs and sweat—
> European cursing in the grove—wages weak
> as yesterday's maure. I should see injustice,
> not slow water and the beating birds
> that never move a foot against the sun.

Hugo does see injustice, if I read his tone correctly, but he sees something else as well, hinted at in the "slow water," "beating birds," and "sun." That other thing, which is linked to nature and natural process, is larger and more important than the injustice. It keeps him from "seeing" the injustice or from reacting as he would like to toward it. It gives him, as he says, bad vision. But it also gives him real vision, and he will not sacrifice that to demands for social justice.

Why? True perception would seem to be its own justification, but there is another reason why Hugo feels "no cause." He has no faith in justice or progress. "All men are rodents clothed," starts a poem on Bosch. In his "Letter to Simic," he says, "The world never learns." It is true that Hugo enjoys trying out feelings; he enjoys pretending. But these two ideas, the first of which is the necessary premise for justice, and the second the necessary premise for progress, come back too often and too reluctantly for them to be ideas he wants to toy with or roles he wants to assume for the poem's duration. *Right Madness* restates them: "Like anyone/I come from a monstrous age"; "What's wrong will always be wrong."

At the heart of Hugo's work, alongside a compassion for life's victims, is an undespairing recognition of what he calls in "Letter to Reed," "The degraded human condition," a world "dying from faith in progress." There are poems in *What Thou Lovest Well Remains American*, like "Starting Back," which call for a rejection of civilization altogether. "Keokuk," in the same book, is almost Luddite in its urging to "batter the factory down and live with famine."

* * *

To the question, then, what is this prototypical American poet doing on the Isle of Skye, I begin to have more answers than I have room to do them justice. Scottish life before Culloden, at least in the Highlands, was something between tribal and feudal, and the people there resisted almost to extermination the efforts of the English to colonize and civilize them. The Isle of Skye, though now much overrun by tourism, is one of the last places where Scots Gaelic is spoken and where people cling fiercely to the few remnants of their indigenous, pre-industrial culture. The moors and valleys of the island still bear the visible outlines of ruined cottages, once lived in by crofters or farmers, cleared off the land one day by landlords who decided to give up their feudal responsibilities as landlords to tenants and make money instead. Farms and farmers were pushed aside to make way for sheep. Sheep did not

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

require housing, feeding, or very much medicine. They brought good prices in the market. Skye is a place of remote, isolated spaces, mist, intermittent sun, cold northerly winds, rain, deep gorges cut by fast, tumbling, trout-bearing streams. It has, at certain moments, a prehistoric bleakness. And though Richard Hugo was an outsider and a stranger to that place, he recognized the essentials of its inner life, saw that they were his as well, and quickly made his poems grow there. It is no fluke that the first poem in the book was written from a calendar photograph before he went. Skye is another place where Richard Hugo has encountered the remnants of a peasant poverty and a peasant honesty and fortitude, which are, for him, the final, necessary consolations.

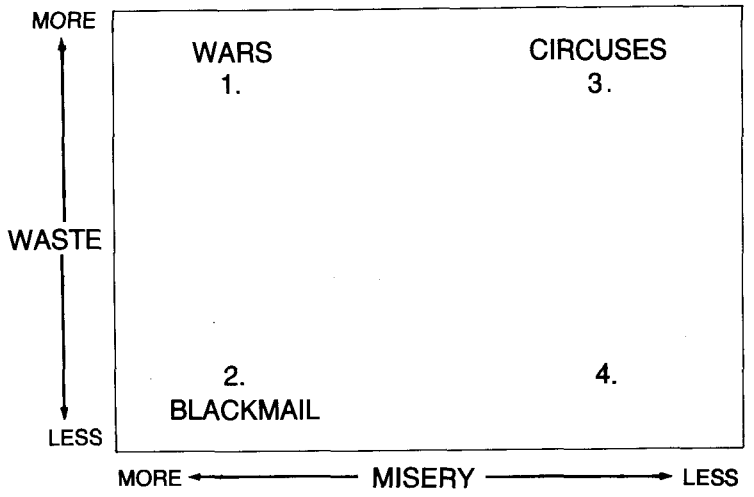
> To be as good as these people are, you
> must have cruelty
> deep in your history, must have tested
> your capacity
> for hate long ago and know how bad it
> can be and
> what it can do.
> ("Letter to Garber From Skye")

> The viking bones found here
> don't care what we or the man they
> belonged to did.
> They don't blush for their part in op-
> pression,
> innocent women in shock.
> There's a way of saying, "Yes! We
> were rotten, so what?"
> Of saying it any time we want to the
> sea
> That answers softly in Gaelic and
> doesn't indict.
> ("Mill at Romesdal")

"I'm back at the primal source of poems," he said in "Letter to Kizer": "wind, sea/and rain, the market and salmon." "Letter to Kizer" is from *31 Letters and 13 Dreams* and was written and set in Seattle. Skye, too, was a primal source. As his latest book shows, he wrote some of his best poetry there. *–Roger Mitchell*

The Old Ways, by Gary Snyder. City Lights. $2.50
The Real Work, by Gary Snyder. New Directions. $4.95

Who hurts humanity most? Imagine a square scale, ranging from those who cause the most misery (at the left) to those who cause the least (at the right), and from those who waste the most energy (at the top) to those who waste the least:



In the top left corner, those who cause wars increase both waste and misery enormously. Jimmy Carter may come to seem admirable because he did so little to increase either; he comes nearer the center than many more popular presidents. We often approve of waste. President Nixon did, when he said America's consumption of oil proved its greatness; later generations may think such waste helped cause its downfall.

In the bottom left, an efficient blackmailer and the perversely moral cause much misery while wasting little energy, and encouraging others to do likewise by avoiding any further misbehavior; puritan societies encourage thrift.

In the top right corner, such circuses as the Great Gatsby's parties may make many happy, but not for long. As Henry Adams said in *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma* in 1919, we celebrate our independence by squandering the energy which makes it possible, hastening the day when the universe becomes all one cosmic ash heap. F. Scott Fitzgerald knew Adams, and used that metaphor in *The Great Gatsby*, which he originally titled *Among Ashheaps and Millionaires*. Gatsby's guests ruin things and people, and make what was once the "fresh, green breast of the new world" a valley of ashes, the end result of wasted energy. As Adams recognized, our celebrations and successes exhaust our sources of energy so quickly that not even nuclear energy can keep us happy long.

Having tried the other three, with miserable results, can we now back into the fourth and final corner, and live happily while wasting very little? Some saints of conservation have: Thoreau at Walden; John Muir as he explored the Sierra Nevada, keeping alive on bread and water; and Gary Snyder and his family on their tiny forest farm. As Snyder points out, those tribes we call "primitive" also did; they saved their environments for us to spoil. This fourth approach, which seems the most archaic, also proves the one most concerned with the future.

Snyder writes in praise of those environments, and of our species' most archaic values, including "the common work of the tribe" in surviving. He takes his own advice. After weeks of lectures and poetry readings, he gets home to

> start spring planting and then . . . it's time to do the building that has to be done, and then . . . to start cutting firewood, and then . . . to start picking apples and drying them . . . and then . . . to harvest . . . and a lot of canning . . . and then I've got to put the firewood in . . . December, January, and February is my time of total isolation, writing

while winter snow makes farming and traveling impossible, and then the lectures and readings begin again; they concern the work and the relationships with the environment on which our lives depend.

Instead of a version of Thoreau's chapter on the economics of life at Walden, complete with figures, these two books of talks explain how Snyder came to discover the implications of the need to live economically and compassionately, which increasingly concern us all, whether we yet know it or not. His poems also involve such relationships, and have their own economy: they concentrate on isolated, intensely emotional moments, using the fewest possible words. So did the imagist lyrics Ezra Pound wrote in 1908-18. But unlike Pound, Snyder went on to make such moments meaningful as parts and signals of the world we all inhabit. As he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

says, many get "driven into solitude, into their own personality, by the stresses of our culture, but don't look for strength there." Instead, he says, we need to look beyond ourselves and our petroleum-addicted culture to other cultures, and to the world we all share, but still so unequally and destructively.

If we can escape the wasteful mpseries of our increasingly narcissistic culture in this way, we can have the advantage Peter Medewar noticed when he reviewed James Watson's *The Double Helix:*

> During the 1950's, the first great age of molecular biology, the English schools of Oxford and particularly of Cambridge produced more than a score of graduates of quite outstanding ability—much more brilliant, inventive, articulate . . . than most young scientists. But Watson had one towering advantage . . . he had something to be clever *about*. . .

But so has Snyder, and so we all can; we need to act intelligently about those permanent circumstances of our lives which Snyder praises, and can help us understand.

—Robert Ian Scott

Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building, by Richard Drinnon. Minnesota. $20.00

The South Corner of Time: Hopi, Navajo, Papago, Yaqui Tribal Literature. Sun Tracks, An American Indian Literary Magazine, Vol. VI. Department of English, University of Arizona. $10.00

Hangin' On: Gordon Snidow Portrays the Cowboy Heritage, by Bruce Berger, with photographs by Linda Fry. Northland. $40.00; $18.50 (paper)

In 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner argued before the American Historical Association that the American West was more significant in explaining American history than anyone had imagined up to that time. The history of America, said Turner, was the history of the colonization of "the Great West." A free land, always receding in the advancement of American settlement, explained American development. The frontier was not one place, never changing; rather, it was recurrent, successive, always moving. It was a place where civilization confronted the wilderness, tamed it and moved on to greater conquests, newer frontiers. The metaphor was one of wave upon wave of European and Anglo-American assumptions and values flooding across the continent from the fifteenth century into the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries when the westward colonization of America presumably ended. Stopped short.

Missionaries and priests, trappers and traders, soldiers and explorers, settlers and merchants, ranchers and cowboys, railroad and mining moguls—all of these had their day, their time, their frontier. Turner saw it all as grand, significant—a destiny made manifest in the imposition of Yankee individualism and democracy. The wave of the future, of Anglo-American character, of progress—this was good, inevitable and evolutionary. The "Great West" was meant to be colonized. The land had to be cleared, developed. And natural resources had to be used, the buffalo shot. The Indian was a lower order, primitive, a savage, and needed to be either removed or assimilated—washed away or cleansed as the "wave" theory would have it.

Richard Drinnon's *Facing West* is concerned explicitly with Turner's assumptions and conclusions about the significance and meaning of the American West, offering a revisionist look at America's westward course of empire and concluding that frontier heroes and historians have been more racist than righteous in their views. The Native American tribal literature in *The South Corner of Time* and Bruce Berger's and Linda Fry's presentation of the cowboy heritage of Gordon Snidow's western paintings both implicitly reinforce Drinnon's argument against the adequacy of such a single frontier thesis. All three books confirm that although Turner was right in arguing that westering is indeed significant in American history, his assumptions and points of argument, like so much information and image surrounding "cowboys and Indians" are oversimplifications which perpetuate stereotyping. There were and are many Wests and many ways of seeing it and interpreting it, in all its paradox, as (in the words of Ray Allen Billington) "a land of savagery and promise"—enigmatic, complex, impossible to encapsulate in any analytical "thesis" about its process and essence.

Befitting its subject, Drinnon's is a long book, with a large canvas. The American West does not end at California's coast for him. It extends across the Pacific to the Philippine Islands and to Indochina where American imperialism was translated into "pacification" massacres like My Lai. Believing what Melville describes in *The Confidence Man* as "the metaphysics of Indian hating" is the American stance from colonial days to the present, Drinnon takes issue with Turner's thesis. The glance he casts over his shoulder at American history and Turner's version of it is an apprehensive one, to say the least. Where Turner saw American expansiveness as the key to its democracy, Drinnon demurs. Where Turner saw the "problem of the West" as the disappearance of new and free land, Drinnon sees it as the dispossession of Native Americans, considered more "native" than American. In Turner's view, Americans were not necessarily English but composites of European stock. And in his championing of such empire builders as Daniel Boone, Drinnon indicts Turner as an Indian hater and says about Turner's designation of the frontier as that place where civilization meets savagery: "Turner's color line was the supreme expression by a historian of all the other expressions before and since by novelists, poets, playwrights, pulp writers, painters, sculptors, and film directors. It separated the cowboys from the Indians by making the latter easily recognizable dark targets. . . ." In so doing, says Drinnon, Turner helped shape national "patterns of violence." Turner was right in saying that the West was not so much a place as a social force, but that social force was contingent on empire building and Indian hating.

In mapping this metaphysic Drinnon analyzes the Massachusetts Bay Colony, then the Alleghenies and Mississippi settlement, then moves across the Rockies to the Pacific slope and onto the Island "stepping stones" of the Philippines and then Asia, following a straight line of expansion almost to full circle. Like Vine Deloria, Jr., Drinnon contends that Christian religion and the Western idea of history go hand in hand and contribute to the notion that time is progress, seen in linear terms. Drinnon is more cyclical and synchronic in his view of time and history.

Ultimately, it is language which becomes Drinnon's subject and his medium, for he considers both what

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has been said and left unsaid by the writers and historians he considers. Thus his history takes on a decidedly biographical cast. Individuals are seen as embodying larger values either shared or resisted by others. Thomas Morton of Merrimount, Western writer Mary Austin, Indian painter and ethnologist George Catlin, Herman Melville and Thoreau are all culture heroes for Drinnon, thinkers who saw more deeply the true worth of the American Indian. Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe as early advocates of Indian removal, "philanthropist" Thomas L. McKenney, historians and public servants like Henry Adams, John Hay, and CIA counter-insurgent Edward G. Lansdale play a relatively more villainous role in Drinnon's scheme of things.

One of Drinnon's most provocative and convincing themes, extending throughout the book, is the correlation he poses between repression and violence, the notion that out of frustration grows aggression. Drinnon attributes much of America's discontent to the puritanical repression not just of sexual pleasure and things of the flesh but to "social controls . . . imposed upon the desires and needs of the *whole* body." Governmental repression of such ceremonies as the Sun Dance, is but one official example of larger social attitudes toward dancing as sin, rather than sacred play. This theme is reinforced by discussions of racist attitudes which reduced various Native American tribes and cultures to one hated nonwhite group seen as beasts rather than human, and which came to include hatred of other nonwhites in America and in Asia. More concerned with the consequences of racism than its obscure unconscious causes, Drinnon asserts that more than any consideration of class or of property, racism enabled nonwhites to be viewed as *others*, taboo in their person and ways, undeserving of their heritage and lands.

Each reader will find issues and personages of special interest in *Facing West*. Drinnon's chapter on Mary Austin is particularly noteworthy. Her feelings expressed in *The Land of Little Rain* and *American Rhythm* are considered by Drinnon illustrative of her love affair with both the land and its aboriginal life. To Drinnon, Austin is one of the few who came to appreciate the inherent "cherished rhythms" and "dancing

The ONTARIO Review

a North American Journal of the Arts

"*The Ontario Review* concentrates on both American and Canadian writers and artists. . . . In both cases, the editors' wide range of curiosity and acquaintance, and the stature and integrity of their concern for good writing—writing that attempts to confront contemporary experience at the deepest levels—make this one of the most significant literary journals now published."
—Dewitt Henry, *Wilson Library Bulletin*

Recent contributors to *The Ontario Review* include:

MARGARET ATWOOD
EARLE BIRNEY
EAVAN BOLAND
ELIZABETH BREWSTER
BARRY CALLAGHAN
OLIVIA DAVIS
JOHN DITSKY
BÉLA EGYEDI
WILLIAM EVERSON
CARLOS FUENTES
REGINALD GIBBONS
MIROSLAV HOLUB
LEWIS HORNE
TED HUGHES
DAVID IGNATOW
BRAD IVERSON
EDMUND KEELEY
MAXINE KUMIN
IRVING LAYTON
JOHN LOGAN
ARTUR LUNDKVIST
IRVING MALIN
JEROME MAZZARO
R. K. MEINERS
PERRY MEISEL
CHARLES MOLESWORTH
FREDERICK MORGAN
ALDEN NOWLAN
JOYCE CAROL OATES
GRAHAM PETRIE
MATT PHILLIPS
ROBERT PHILLIPS
REYNOLDS PRICE
DAVID RAY
JOHN R. REED
LARRY RUBIN
LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ
WILLIAM JAY SMITH
ELIZABETH SPENCER
PETER STEVENS
JOHN UPDIKE
GARY F. WALLER
TOM WAYMAN
ROBLEY WILSON, JR.
GEORGE WOODCOCK
DERK WYNAND

Subscribe now:

THE ONTARIO REVIEW
9 Honey Brook Drive
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

Rates: $7.00 for one year (two issues); $13.00 for two years; $18.00 for three years. Outside North America, add 50 cents per year.

Coming in the NAR:

William F. Fry, Jr. on the Generations

Thomas H. Thompson on Freud and Religion

Thomas Remington on Science Fiction

Stories by Eric Larsen, Clyde Clatterbuck, Molly Giles, Nancy Potter

David Hellerstein, Lawrence Sturhahn, Kenneth Lash

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prayers" of America and its native peoples. Admittedly, she too was enamored of certain ideas of Social Darwinism about "primitive" culture, but she made the attempt to know the visionary experiences of Indian lives and communicate them, empathetically, to others. For this she proved the frontier and the "savage" much more significant than Turner had suggested some years before her writings.

* * *

Since its beginning nearly ten years ago, *Sun Tracks* has proved itself a quality literary magazine and probably the best American Indian magazine yet to appear. Volume Six outshines even its own predecessors. Editor Larry Evers has brought together a dazzlingly beautiful and moving collection of Hopi, Navajo, Papago and Yaqui tribal literature. Any misinformation about the lack of civility, civilization and diversity of Native American cultures and literatures will be hastily corrected by a reading of these pages. Evers explains in his eloquent introduction that the purpose of *Sun Tracks* is "to help people recognize and appreciate this country's native literary heritage." The method is to let Indian people speak for themselves, and the result is almost overpowering.

Organized into four sections, one for each of the tribal literatures, and highlighted by stunning photographs of faces and places of each tribe, nothing is so certain here as the individuality and uniqueness of Native Americans. Here between two covers is proof, for those who need it, that there is no such thing as *the* American Indian or an American Indian literature. Nothing so simple. Oral tradition, audience, performance, translation—listening is as important as reading when print becomes an approximation of oral performance, when translations are as concerned with the spirit as with the letter of the word.

Whatever is heard or sensed here, the sources are authentic—something hard to come by in these trendy days when books like *Hanta Yo* move to the top of the best-seller lists. But American Indian literature has itself never been trendy. For centuries the winter solstice, "The South Corner of Time" has marked a special story-telling time for Native Americans and so it is here in this very special issue of *Sun Tracks*.

As with *Facing West,* each reader will encounter a favorite section or two. Navajo tribal literature is particularly beautiful and meaningful as a reflection of the country I knew growing up in New Mexico. Tom Ration's "A Navajo Life Story"; Kenjii Kawano's portfolio of photographs of Arizona people; Nancy Woodman's "The Story of an Orphan"; Betty John's "The Rescue"; Irene Nakai, Agnes Tso's and Nia Francisco's poetry; Andrew Natonabah's "Song of A Mountain"—they all bring back the Navajo Southwest in old-new ways. Lee Marmon's photograph of Mt. Taylor is literally transporting. And when combined with Natonabah's song to the "strong turquoise" and "white shell" of Mount Taylor and Blanca Peak thoughts about walking in beauty and long life come fast: Listen—

> By means of it, in front of me, beauty, you think about it,
> By means of it, from behind me, beauty, you think about it,
> By means of it, from below me, beauty, you think about it,
> By means of it, around me, just, all, beauty, you think about it,
> By means of it, from my mouth, beauty, you think about it,
> By means of it, now, long life,
> Now, by it, beauty, me, I am, you think about it.

Agnes Tso's triptych "rain song" is nothing short of exhilarating: "male rain has come and gone/female rain is fading in the distance/father sun is here/and mother earth is awakening." Each of the selections in *The South Corner of Time* bespeaks the living, continuing heritages of American Indian culture and history—a history Frederick Jackson Turner never really acknowledged or, seemingly, attempted to understand.

* * *

The cowboy heritage portrayed by Gordon Snidow has its own special reality and authenticity as well. And Northland Press is to be congratulated for another distinctive book of Western Americana. Expensive as it is, *Hangin' On* is worth the money, considering the expense of things western today. One of Snidow's original paintings now sells for thousands of dollars. For the twenty or forty bucks one chooses to spend for this coffee-table display you get an introduction by John Connally, a biographical essay on Snidow and cowboys by Bruce Berger, and nearly forty ultra-realistic and grittily human portraits of contemporary American cowboys in sundry poses of work and leisure—riding, roping, hunkering, whittling, fence-sitting and beer drinking. Although the reason for being of some of the portraits seems nothing more than a commercial sign-board or poster advertising Coor's, Snidow's art does make its statement: the cowboy is still "hangin' on," is still alive, chewin' and spittin'—out on the range and not merely in the media. Rural cowboys exist too, beyond stereotype and hype.

And yet there is a bothersome selling-of-the-West, self-consciously stylized quality to Snidow's slick renderings of cowboy life—something other western artists like Peter Hurd, or Ross Stefan, for example, never allowed into their portrayals of what a cowboy's life is really like. It may be attributable to the fact that Snidow has been engulfed by the popularity of urban cowboys, a cowboymania which Bruce Berger insists Snidow is beyond. It may be because Western art, literature and painting, is so often fake in the midst of its claim to "realism." Snidow, however, chose to become a Western artist long before it became fashionable. His art is, finally, sincere and long suffered. Usually in his paintings one sees the free spirit of cowboying that allows the cowboy to endure (like the Indian) far past the settlers, "bosses," lawmen and robber barons who used the cowboy but never dominated him.

* * *

The significance of the American West goes much beyond theorizing and theses of one kind or another—beyond books and pictures, beyond art into life. But books of history and literature and pictures such as *Facing West, The South Corner of Time* and *Hangin' On,* in their arguments and artistry, reaffirm a spirit and a place, whatever and wherever it was and is, good or bad, or significant to America's sense of self. —*Robert Gish*

American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History, Christopher Vecsey and Robert W. Venables, eds. Syracuse. $9.95 (paper)

Imagine an Eden-like land about the size of the North American continent populated by about 12 million intelli-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gent beings much like ourselves. These beings have lived on this land for about 50 thousand years, and have developed a wide variety of technologies and cultural systems. They have many urban centers, some with populations as large as 30,000. They have sophisticated irrigation systems and complex agricultural development including more than 150 species of domestic plants used for food, tools, clothing and medicine. They have no domesticated animals, but when they consume animal protein, it is obtained by hunting and fishing. They spend about three hours a day in work, and the rest of the time is devoted to play, the arts and various celebrations.

These beings hold one thing in common, while otherwise living diverse lifeways in relative harmony with themselves and their environments. They all take their sense of identity and their ethical, religious and philosophical values from the specific places they inhabit. They believe that the species and natural settings around them are endowed with souls, and that the wild animals are creatures like themselves with intelligence and spiritual lives like their own. One of their primary values is to practice courteousness and honesty toward their fellow animals, and to accord them respect in both their lives and their deaths.

This is no Utopian science fiction, but a fictionalized summary of a book about the state of Native American life before the arrival of European colonials 500 years ago. Since that time, the editors tell us, Native American population has dropped to 1 million, including mixed bloods. Half of these people live in urban centers of the United States where they are mostly employed in menial jobs. The other half live on some 400 reservations, two-thirds of them smaller than the size of Florida's Disneyland. All suffer from the social disequilibrium caused by displacement to what can only be called, in most cases, refugee centers, assigned in a kind of feudal redistribution of land by the invading Europeans. Even within the past 40 years, this land base of Native Americans has decreased by over 1.8 million acres, about one-fourth of which is now used for dams, reservoirs, and other water projects.

* * *

These are among the facts contained in this compact anthology of 10 essays presented at two 1979 conferences on Native Americans and their historical and contemporary relationships to the natural world. While some of the essays are a bit pedantic in style, all provide new insight into the complexities of the rich culture of Native Americans and their sufferings during the 500 year occupation of lands they once freely inhabited.

Most Americans think in terms of noble pioneers and industrialists taming a vast, virgin wilderness. It was vast, all right, but hardly virgin, and even the wilderness provided shelter and sustenance for the wild life that sustained the 12 million humans living in ecological balance with their environments when the Europeans arrived. Indeed, William Hagan tells us, it was the very use that Native Americans had made of the land that gave European Christian immigrants the justification they needed to displace the former residents. The Biblical mandate to multiply and to have dominion over the life of the earth was in total contradiction to the "pagan" Native American world view. And many Europeans espoused the ethical validity of Sir Thomas More's Utopian view that even war was justified "when any people holdeth a piece of ground void and vacant to no good or profitable use . . .." Lacking the benefit of Native American wisdom about ecological balance, the invaders expelled the former residents, appropriated the land, and put it to the "good and profitable use" they had learned in Europe. Alas, we now know that the European conception of land use did not always result in positive benefits.

Native Americans of the Grassy Narrows band in Ontario know it, too. These former Ojibway hunters, after suffering a series of health and religious disasters, were encouraged by the Canadian government in 1968 to move from their homes along the shores of Hudson's Bay to a new reserve in the English and Wabigoon river systems. Here they are now being systematically poisoned and disenfranchised by the effects of 20 thousand pounds of mercury dumped into the Wabigoon River between 1962 and 1970. The grim social and psychological (let alone physical) effects of this move have not and can never be alleviated by financial aid, say Kai Erikson and Vecsey, who wrote "Report to the People of Grassy Narrows."

Perhaps the most important contribution of this book is its discussion of the ecological success of Native Americans before the invasions of foreigners—a success that stemmed from the profound spiritual and practical meaning of their relationships to the land and its life. Vecsey notes the pervading view of Native Americans was, and is, that they are an integral part of the natural environment they regard with both love and awe. They are keenly aware of their reciprocal relationships with nature, and for that reason, with few exceptions, they were good conservators and balanced exploiters of the land. "Indians did not love the concept of nature; they loved particular locations, particular aspects of their environment . . . Indians found their world filled with special spots where power for life was concentrated . . . It was for the right and ability to continue in relation to sacred space that American Indians resisted white invaders."

* * *

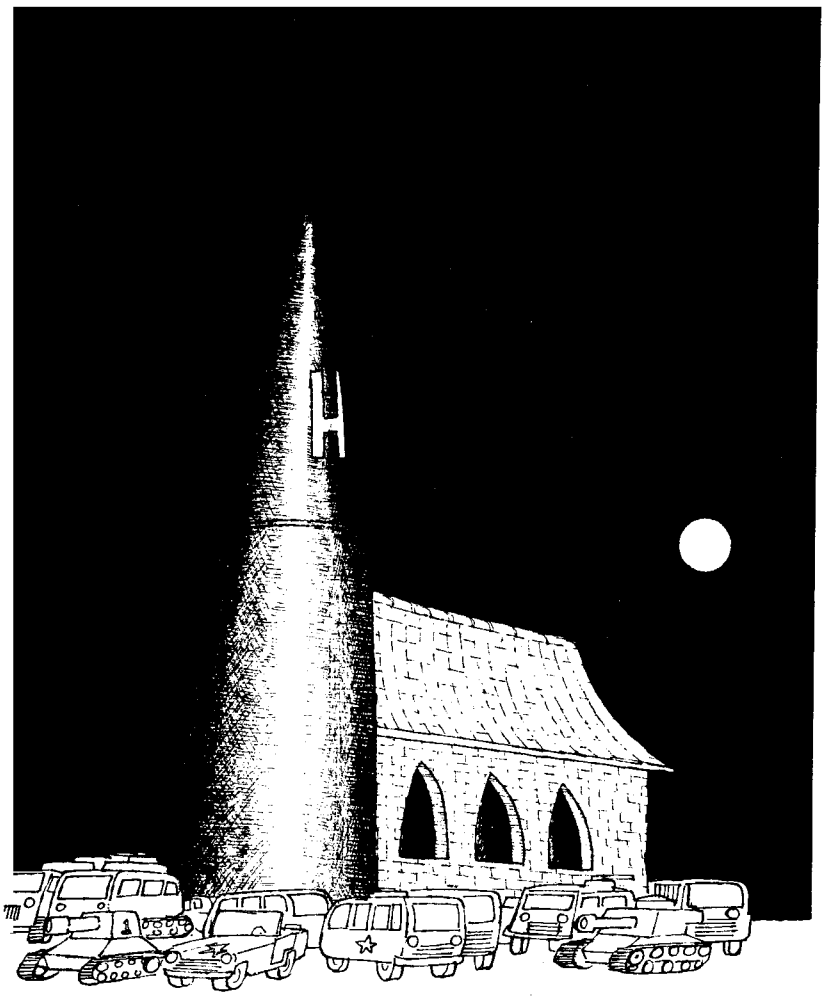
Indian "spiritual ecologists" presaged what biological ecologists are telling us about our imbalance with nature today. Now public school teachers and university scientists are joining the ranks of anthropologists and ethnologists to study Indian ways, not as the curious practices of noble savages, but as the useful knowledge of savants which may help us find better means of sustaining our relationship with our source of life . . . the earth and its resources. However, Vecsey notes the irony of the surge of interest in Indian environmentalism in light of present energy shortages and observes, "as whites turn to Indians for ecological lessons, they are also turning to Indian natural resources to fuel mechanized Western society. The white threat to Indians and their environments is as great today as in any time in history."

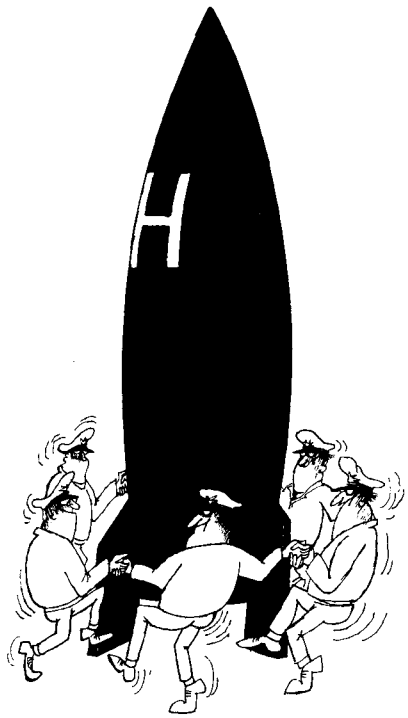
As late-comers to this continent, we might ponder the wisdom of Oren Lyons in "An Iroquois Prespective," the concluding essay in this book: "We are looking ahead, as is one of the first mandates given to us as chiefs, to make . . . every decision that we make relate to the welfare and well-being of the seventh generation to come . . . What about that seventh generation? Where are you taking them? What will they have?"

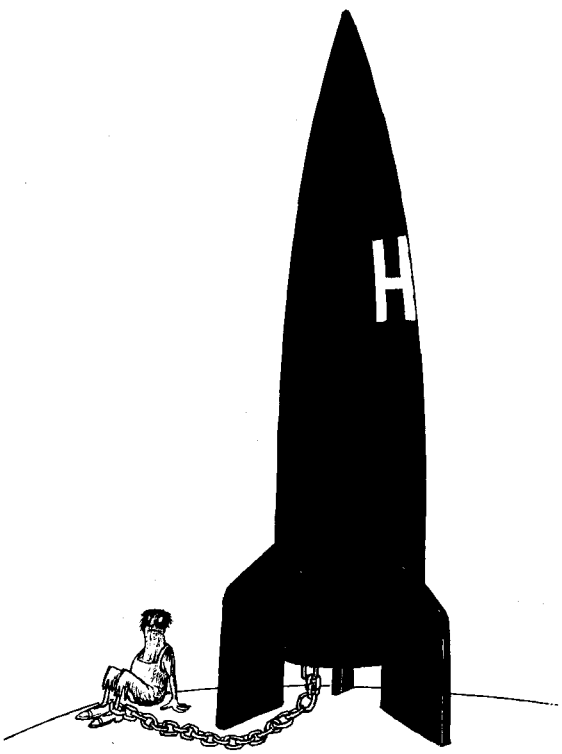
–Loree Rackstraw

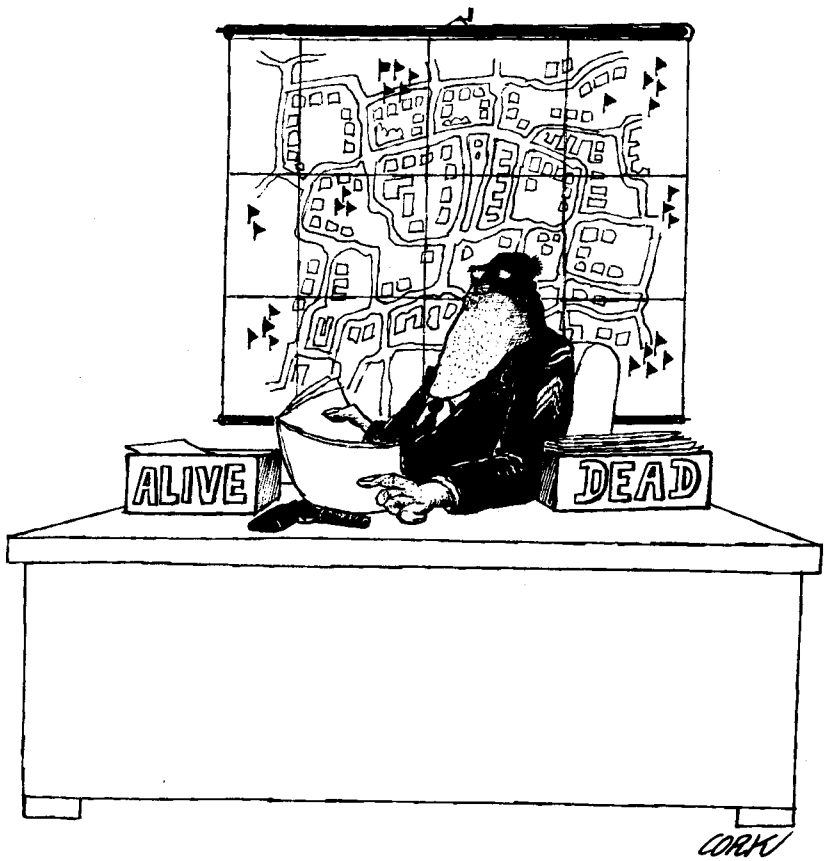
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WAR GAMES AGAIN









PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vignettes, Variations, and the New (Reagan) Year

New year's . . . last year's resolutions . . . *last year* . . . the travesty of the election . . . Reagan and the California élite . . . Hollywood on the Potomac . . . *The Third Wave* . . . El Salvador and the uses of power . . . Iran, Mexico, Israel, Poland—tinder boxes pullulate . . . 12% inflation . . . interest rates . . . the Citizen's Party . . . Structuralism & "morphogenesis" . . . double U.S. military spending to $250 billion a year . . . the human attention span—attuned by TV—one minute—three minutes—a sentence—a paragraph—simplicity . . . vignettes . . .

* * *

FUTURE—"We are at one of the decisive turning points in human history," urban planner E.A. Gutkind, quoted in *Human Scale* by Kirkpatrick Sale, says. Alvin Toffler, in his *Third Wave* agrees and he's optimistic about the outcome of decentralization, populism, diversity, silicon chip technology, the application of binary numbers, the small-is-beautiful deal, a home-centered economy, the structuralist view: not only of society, but the macrocosm. As John Muir once wisely said: "Whenever I tried to separate anything out by itself, I found it hitched to everything else in the universe." Steve McNamara, editor of *The Pacific Sun* writes: "Toffler's first advice is to forget about the split between capitalism and communism . . . both versions of industrialism, a system based on fossil fuels, factory technology, the splitting of producers and consumers and the construction of a marketing and distribution system to link them, the nuclear family to serve the factory system and a school system which teaches values important to the factory: punctuality, obedience and learning by rote . . ."

FUTURE—At his confirmation hearings General Alexander Haig stated that "*there are worse things than war . . .*" Worse than *thermonuclear war* (out of which cockroaches and some species of flies could be expected to inherit the earth)?

FUTURE—Speaking to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council in December, quoted in *Variety*, 20th Century Fox chairman Debnis C. Stanfill predicted that by 1985, when the average cost of making and marketing a movie is predicted to be $25 million, there won't be as many companies making them. The "weaker sisters" will have fallen by the wayside. Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), at the same conference, concurred. Describing the "pot of gold" for the industry at the decade's end, he also quoted Alfred North Whitehead, who said " 'those events most benefiting mankind almost wrecked the society in which they occurred' . . . At the end of this century we will have become an all-electronic society," Jack says. "The concept of digital, that is making films *without* film, will be a part of our lives. Digital converts every image into a series of binary numbers."

HISTORY—In an extract from information released by Frank Barnaby, Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, note that "in The Third World 15 million infants die every year mostly from diseases that could be eliminated by vaccines . . . malnutrition is the biggest cause of premature death among adults and children in poorer countries . . . contaminated drinking water is responsible for four out of five infectious diseases, and about two billion people do not have access to safe water . . . that these things (and others, including illiteracy) could be eliminated by the diversion to foreign aid of a small fraction of the military budgets of the great powers." The world spends more than *$500 billion a year on military activities, about $1 million a minute.*

FUTURE—Reprinted from *Lighting Dimension*, a magazine about light for film, video, theatre: "Until now, lighting effects for sexual acts have been primarily mood inducing. The psychological state required for utmost fulfillment varies greatly and can be enhanced by many variables, not the least of which is lighting . . . shy people may prefer darkness . . . flickering light may be the choice of drive-in movie enthusiasts . . . nature lovers may choose sunlight. While all of these lighting conditions are selected for psychological reasons, there may also be a correlation between light and the psychology of sex. It is well known that light affects the body in many ways . . . would it not be reasonable to assume that light in proper intensity and wave length could create physiological conditions favorable to sexual activity? With proper research, lighting devices could be sold as sexual aids. Imagine the available market for lighting kits . . . including manuals, ceiling mirrors, assorted paraphernalia. What a boom they would bring to the lighting business. New empires would be erected, a fitting climax to operations that have often been in the hole . . . The project should be started at once. The research alone makes the doing worthwhile."

HISTORY—Michael Cimino, whom Coppola considered in 1979 to be one of the industry élite (young turks), spent his $40 million, and the picture, "Heaven's Gate," the talk of the industry for several years, opened to massive fanfare on a Tuesday night in November in New York. The next morning United Artists took it out of release.

FUTURE—United Artists senior world-wide production chief Steven Bach said in November (*Variety*) that, due to escalating astronomical costs of film making, "in a nutshell, the small picture is in big trouble—in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fact, all but officially kaput . . ." These are films with no box-office clout (bankability) which cost as much to release as to make, "an endangered species again." Among those things written on Bach's wall, auguries of an industry-wide reduction in output, the first casualty being those small, quality films that U.A. once specialized in. "Starting now," he says, "you'll see a different kind of picture coming out of United Artists . . . larger more commerical movies."

HISTORY—The aforementioned Mr. Bach said in January (*Variety*) that "Heaven's Gate" only cost $35,400,000. Recutting it will only mean another $600,000. According to Mr. Bach, Mr. Cimino is "extremely cooperative under extraordinary circumstances *(indeed!)*. I wish Michael to stay on and finish the film. If he didn't, I would be very sorry . . .." Offering a bit of "budgetary give and take—on one Wednesday, for example, there are 50 extras down. Michael says he needs 800 extras. Now we say nobody needs 800 extras. Either way, there must be a cogent, aesthetic argument. Then we say—how about 200? You must compromise [*indeed*—see Greg Leichner's "On Location in Montana," *NAR*, Spring 1980]. The first time we saw the entire film . . . with an audience I said to myself we have made a mistake [*indeed?*]—a mistake which can be corrected . . . basically the film's problem. Length . . . there is incredibly ravishing stuff but too much of it. With 90 minutes less background," Steve says, "you will see a big difference."

HISTORY—Of the excellent "Raging Bull" three things might be said: that Martin Scorsese rested from his labors at preserving old color films to make a film in *black and white*; and based on Jake LaMotta's autobiography (screenplay by Paul Schrader), note that Robert De Niro's performance in it, both as an actor and in gaining weight, is virtuoso—superlative (in fact, as are the rest of the cast); and that, contrary to one opinion I read, saying the movie had no meaning/message (read: reason to be made), its presentation is its message; it's a film about people (a prizefighter, that *sport?*), nevertheless the people ring real—significance.

PROGNOSTICATION—Black and white movies are coming back—thankfully—as an aesthetic form. Or people are ignoring the television proscription (it used to be they wouldn't buy it if it wasn't color). Are producers making the pictures on color negative and striking *b/w* release prints for theatre exhibition, has the network coda changed, or don't these producers-of-clout care if they get a TV release? Anyway, it seems black and white movies *are* coming back.

HISTORY—In 1980 occurred the longest-in-history Screen Actors' Guild strike, which some actors think the union came out second best on. What the big fight's about is/was a slice of the cable pie, residual payments on distribution to, entertainment for, the Stay-At-Home Culture. This *nom de genre* is apparently ascribed to Emanuel Gerard, a man in the office of the president of Warner Communications, Inc., whose cable subsidiary is the fifth largest multiple-system extant. Among other of Mr. Gerard's forecasts is what he calls "the Media Room," which, by the end of the decade, will be a fixture in a large number of American homes. Needless to say specifically what such a room provides—*everything*, surrounding the large *flat* screen which will by the center. Such a room will be the approximation of a home theatre and market place, printed information, news, advertisements, all available on the screen, a teleprinter for hard copy, and a two-way phone connection. Given a basic audience of from 13 to 30, and with the increasing cost of going out (not to mention, in some places, the danger of doing it), with your Media Room, as Emanuel is saying, *why* go out?

FUTURE—The National Association of Concessionaires (NAC) chairperson, Philip (Perry) Lowe, quoted in *Variety*, projects that Pay-TV will be yielding $3 billion a year by 1985 (something more then than the take now for theatres), and sees it moving to a penetration of 50 million homes, and raking in $8 billion. An industry researcher of note, marketing specialist, member of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO), he warns that by the end of the decade the refreshment stands will no longer be the only source of profit to the beleaguered theatre owners. The audience will be staying at home. "Mr. Theatre Owner," Lowe asked, "have you considered home delivered popcorn?" Does anyone hear the sound of one hand clapping?

FUTURE—"The Last Great Gold Rush," in cities, towns, the suburban sprawl, across the country, a frantic competition to win cable franchises. Writing in the New York *Times*, Tony Schwartz describes the situation in Cincinnati for the right to wire 161,000 homes—choice of cable system to be made by the city council. The award to one of the six companies bidding could mean a $20 million take; the city stands to make several million in franchise fees each year; civic and educational groups have a stake because of cable's potential to them. According to National Cable Television Association and trade journal projections, approximately 16 million homes are now wired for cable. Five years hence the number projected is 30 million. Revenue now is $1.9 billion, by 1985 it could exceed $5 billion. A 52-channel cable service recently started in East Detroit; in Illinois, Orlando Park is getting the same soon. In the bid for a franchise in Dallas, one company promised 200 channels, within which, one supposes, anything and everything would be available—from porny to immediate stock market quotes. A year ago 23 video services were beaming their programs over RCA's Satcom I, to more than 2,200 earth stations reaching 4,700 cable operators, and 15,147,470 cable households. By 1985, in one forecast, it could be a $14 billion take, and the interesting part of all this is the reason the producers held out so long against the SAG demands for a fair share of this potential windfall was: it was too new, they said, to have experience with, and they couldn't be sure of their future profits. The Writers' Guild is in negotiation now, and that same slice of the pie is on the table; next summer the Directors' Guild will start their bargaining and there it will be again.

PRESENT—Mary Cathleen Collins was born in Long Beach and her early years were spent on the beach—sailing, swimming, surfing. One day she met John Derek who liked her and after some machinations (getting rid of a wife, etc.) he changed her name to Derek by marrying her. He also gave her the name Bo. Bo Derek (you remember her? the small woman with the big breasts exploited for them in the very successful "10"—metaphorically, in fact, she's entered the language, or is it the other way around? anyway—) now a gentleman by the name of Kevin Casselman enters. He owns a

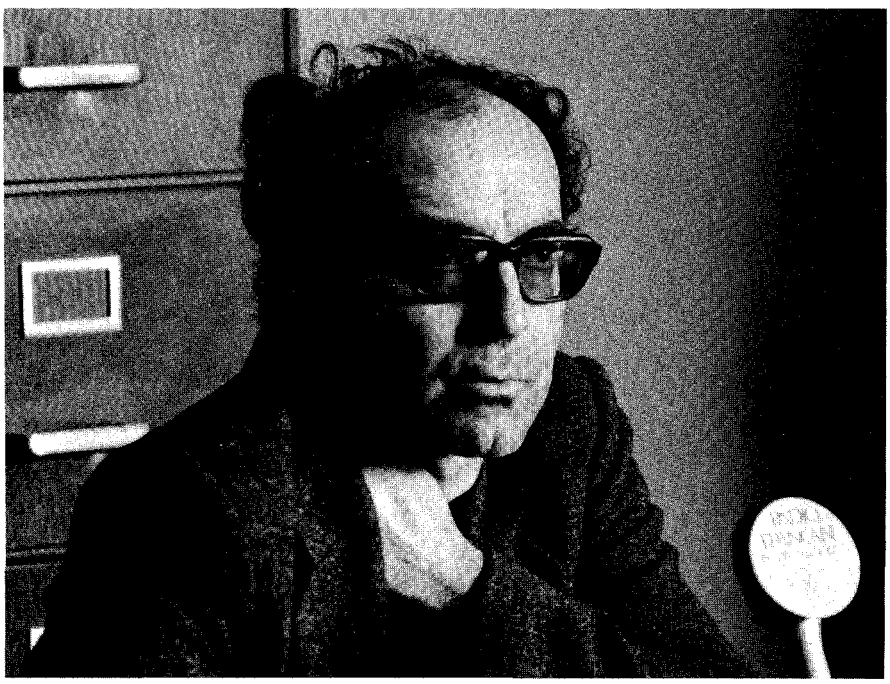
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

film—once called "And Once Upon a Time," now called "Once Upon a Love"—which features the 16-year old Cathleen Collins and some frontal nudity. Kevin has made arrangements to distribute the film in most countries in spite of legal efforts by John and Bo to prevent it. According to John, the implication of his wife being in the film (naked?) at such an early age "could seriously offset her potential employment in the future." Bo says: "I really don't want to be an actress except to make enough money to produce my own pictures. Then I'd like to buy a big ranch and lead a simple life."

* * *

HISTORY—At the Citizens' Party meeting in January there was a screening of a documentary on El Salvador. A simple, flawed, but righteously sincere film on a multifariously complex situation (as what isn't?). Afterwards, in discussing the then most recent killing of Americans—the two land reform people from the A.I.D. office—the rumor was aired that—perhaps—they were in fact CIA. That puts another complexion on their death and who among various interested parties arranged it. One bellwether of the new administration is what happens in El Salvador. See "State of Siege" for evidence, elementary lessons in the art of infiltration/manipulation of friendly (anti-communist/fascist) foreign countries; it is another of Costa Gavras' excellent fictionalized political polemics. This one also stars Yves Montand, playing the American A.I.D. official, a bad guy secret police training officer and torture expert who is taken hostage by a youthful group of dedicated anti-establishment types whose cause is righteous in an un-named central/south American country. Like the Citizens'/Party is for local governance, the phasing out of nuclear power, limiting the political and economic influence by business on government, a sharp reversal of the rate of military spending, public control of the energy industries.

HISTORY—Coppola continues his re-creation of *the-major-studio* of the Halcyon period in American film. His Zoetrope Studios (the old Hollywood General) is a self-contained factory with a back lot to build sets on. For the up-coming $18 million musical, "One from the Heart," that Francis is set to direct, they are building Las Vegas, exteriors and interiors both, at 1040 N. Las Palmes Avenue in Hollywood. And, to his credit, Francis has begun to surround himself with respected and famous industry names, the most recent additon being Jean-Luc Godard. One of the "New Wave" archetypes, certainly he's one of the most innovating and thoughtful film makers in the world today. For the past 8 years experimenting comprehensively with the uses of video—far sighted indeed!—what Godard and Coppola share is a fascination with and thorough knowledge of the hardware of film/video. And that, the hardware, to a greater or lesser extent, creates the *form* of the final product. No thanks to cooperation from the press office of the San Francisco International Film Festival—they could not find any seats for the films I really wanted to see—I got in to Godard's "Every Man for Himself." The picture is a return to the more explicable films of his early work, though, like them, it could hardly be said to be very explicable. Fascinating it is, however, a kind of fugue in four sections: The Imaginary; Fear; Commerce; Music. The focus of Commerce is on a whore, played by the stunning French actress, Isabelle Huppert. As always for me, she's terrific (and starring also in Cimino's "Heaven's Gate": that's *a* reason to see the recut when it's re-released). There's a line in the film: "Love should grow from work." Quoted in *Variety*, Godard said: "On my recent film, we were well prepared. [Screenwriter] Jean-Claude Carriere helped with the structure, but I only went to him about five times, to discuss ideas and pull them together. The lines were created while we were shooting. We arrived at a place, then chose what we wanted to do and maybe used only a small part of that world that we had prepared. The writing and rehearsal were just preparation to create freedom."



HISTORY—In France, recently, there has been an upsurge of anti-semitism and as artists often do, Francois Truffaut's most recent, "The Last Metro," (which he has to have started 2 years ago) is a film about a Paris theatre during World War II under the German occupation, two central characters being a German Jewish director hiding in the cellar from the Nazis and a theatre critic who is an anti-semite, as well as a quisling. Another of the films at the S.F. Festival I had to scratch to see, along with the man himself, translated by his daughter, and accompanied by the film's star, Catherine Deneuve, it was, finally, a good experience all around. Asked by a member of the audience who had just seen the film why he had made it at this time, Truffaut answers in French, is translated by his daughter, words transformed into electrical impulses on the micro tape of my recorder. He had wanted to make it for a long time; in fact, like much of Truffaut's *oeuvre*, it is a reminiscence, this one of the German Occupation of Paris which he experienced as a child. When asked why his films tend to this, he answered: "I guess I'm interested in things that I've had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time to think about." Nevertheless, and by no means to its detriment, "The Last Metro" has more of a linear story, a pointed and general political and social point of view than Truffaut films usually have. It has, as well, all the minute and telling detailing of character and *mise en scene* of his films.

FUTURE—Buried on the entertainment page on January 14 there was a story reporting The President's Council on Environmental Quality warning that energy policy, national and international, *must* start addressing the problem of carbon dioxide pollution of the atmosphere. Worldwide, long range energy plans are being formulated, the "Greenhouse" effect should be incorporated into such plans before *it* begins to be felt, sometime early in the next century—by which time it will be too late to make changes. A simple definition of the "Greenhouse Effect" is that the earth's temperature will rise. It will turn certain arable areas into desert, melt the polar ice and raise the level of the oceans, forcing evacuation of the land along the sea—cities, towns, everything. In the meantime, there's also Acid Rain.

HISTORY—Variety headline, 12/26/80: "UATC PUTTING 3-D EGG IN BASKET . . . Spurred by the urgency of fending off competition from home video entertainment, United Artist Theatre Circuit has perfected and patented a revolutionary new 70mm panoramic three-dimensional production and exhibition process that makes all previous attempts at theatrical 3-D seem primitive by contrast." Called Stereo-Space, the system will only increase production costs 8%, according to UATC technical director, Richard Vetter, and the cost to convert the average 35mm house is projected at $40,000. But Stereo-Space will not make its appearance until 1982. Too little and too late?

FUTURE—Washington, Jan. 15, 1981 (*Variety*) "Motion picture theatre receipts should weather the competition from pay-cable with an 8% annual growth to $4.8 billion in 1985, predicts the U.S. Dept. of Commerce . . . but the government soothsayers warned that the decline in the numbers of teens and lower birthrates could eventually eat into attendance . . . declined to guess how increased competition from pay-cable would figure into the future of exhibs. . . ." That's either hedging the bet, or the objective point of view.

HISTORY—Three excellent films (each in its different way) at the end of the year: "Fort Apache, The Bronx" (director: Daniel Petrie), honest cops & robbers, or close to it, with memorable characters (Paul Newman, of course!), celebrating endurance through death; "Tell Me A Riddle" (director: Lee Grant), adapted from the Tillie Olson fiction, literary, and complex because of *that*, in depth, beautiful photography, provocatively constructed vision of an old Jewish couple's last trip together, a celebration of life in death; "The Return of the Secaucus 7" (Director/Writer/Editor: John Sayles), a *real* low budget item—$40,000 16mm negative cost, $20,000 more for the 35mm blow-up you have to look hard at to tell—that is very real, the weekend reunion in the '70s of seven assorted men and women who knew each other and were arrested at a Peace Demonstration in Washington in the '60s, a small celebration of change.

* * *

PROGNOSTICATION—Are these the motifs of the future then: violence, cancer, ambivalence—or the other? The change?

–Lawrence Sturhahn

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If your airline can't offer you the NAR, ask the attendant what's up.

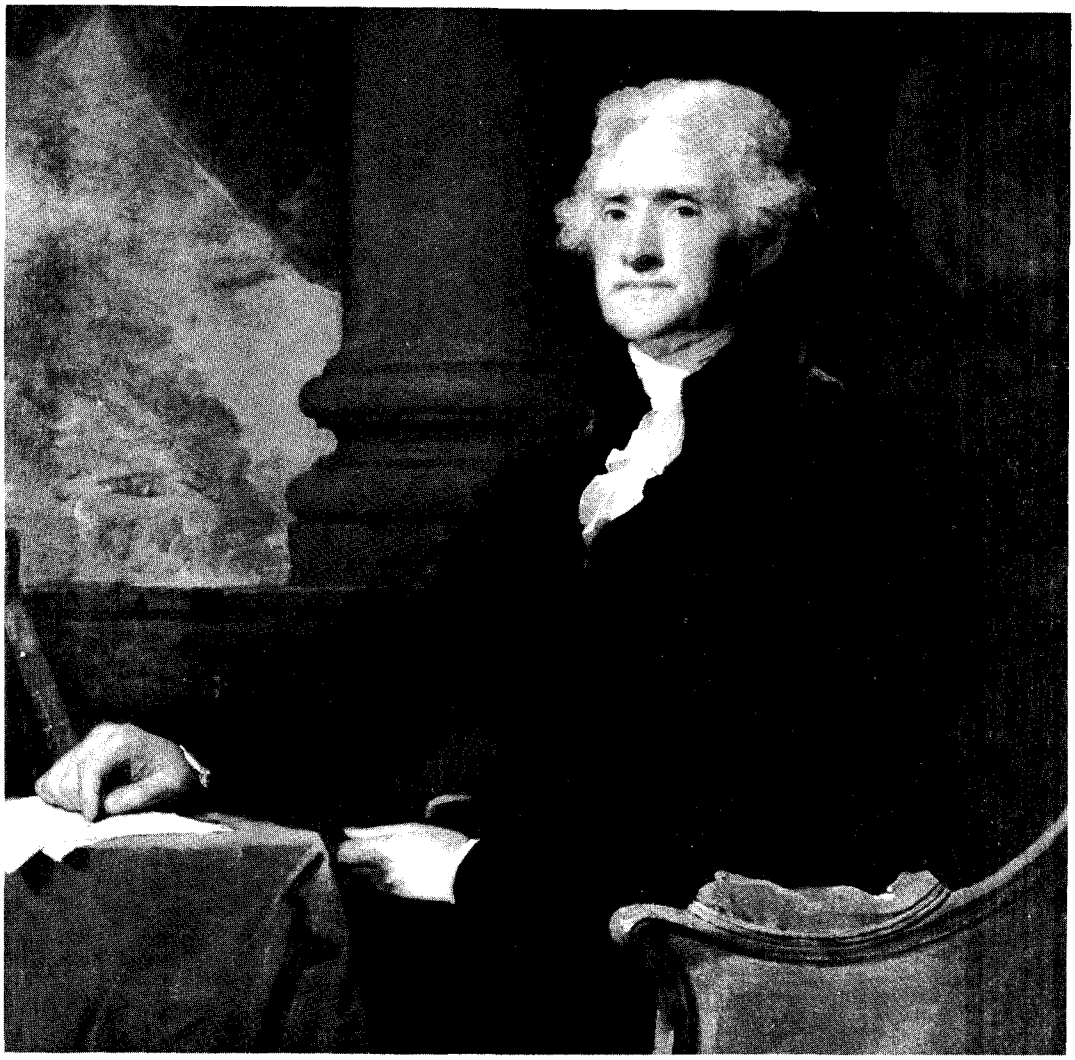
You can always get *Time, Newsweek, Holiday, Mademoiselle*—those mass circulation things everyone knows about—but no matter what airline you fly with, something's missing if the flight attendant can't provide you with *The North American Review*. We're class, not mass, with subscribers in all 50 states and 18 foreign countries. Ask for us every time you fly—and keep asking.

The North American Review

University of Northern Iowa Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NIAGARA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

I am a subscriber to the N. American review and understand you are agent for that work in Richmond. it will be more convenient for me to have it furnished from that place because payment there is easier made. I shall be glad therefore to receive it from you. and this letter presented to Col. Bernard Peyton (my correspdt) of Richmond will ensure your receiving payment from him on my account, once a year or oftener if you chuse. I have received No. 46. but not Nos. 44. and 45. which I shall be glad therefore now to receive. accept the assurance of my respect.

Th: J.

Since 1815, no magazine in America has had a readership more distinguished or a literary history more rich than THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW. Now available at newsstands, as well as by subscription.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED